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A DOUBLE KNOT

A Novel

BY

GEORGE MANVILLE FENN

AUTHOR OF

'ELI'S CHILDREN,' 'THE MASTER OF THE CEREMONIES,' ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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A DOUBLE KNOT.



THE STORY.—YEARS AGO—(Continued).



CHAPTER I.

GERTRUDE'S HUSBAND.

MEANWHILE the days glided on so peacefully for John Huish and his wife, that it seemed to him as if at last the ghost which had haunted his life had been laid.

Sir Humphrey was spending the evening with them, and Dick was expected, as Gertrude was seated in her little drawing-room at the piano, singing one of the sad old melodies that pleased her uncle so well. Her husband was leaning on the instrument gazing down into her gentle eyes, as she looked up at him

with her countenance full of the calm joy she felt in the presence of the man of her choice. He was strange at times, but that did not trouble her, for he was gentle and loving always, ready to humour her slightest whim, and kindness itself to the feeble old gentleman who loved to come and prattle and prose in their quiet little home.

‘John,’ she whispered, as her fingers strayed over the keys, and her voice was rather sad.

‘My darling,’ he said softly.

‘Do you know what it is to feel so happy that it seems as if it could not last?’

‘Yes,’ he said, bending lower over her; ‘I have felt so ever since the day when you consented to be my little wife, and still it lasts.’

The piano was again going softly, and for the third time Gertrude sang, in a voice that lulled the old gentleman off to sleep, ‘Love’s young dream.’

‘Let it be always “Love’s young dream,”’ whispered Huish, as he sank down on one knee beside the music-stool. ‘Gertrude, darling, I am so happy that it is like being in a dream, one from which we will never let the world wake us with its troubles.’

She let her head rest upon his shoulder, and her arm was thrown tightly round his neck.

‘Yes,’ she whispered ; ‘let us dream.’

‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘we two always. I can feel that here within these arms I hold all the world—that heaven has been so bounteous to me that I can never be sufficiently grateful, and——’

He rose quickly, for there was a step outside, and a servant entered.

‘If you please, sir, there are two gentlemen want to see you downstairs.’

Huish turned pale, for a strange sense of coming trouble flashed upon him.

‘Did they send up their names?’ he said, recovering himself.

‘No, sir, only said would you be kind enough to step down, sir, without disturbing my mistress. It was something particular.’

‘Is anything wrong, John?’ said Gertrude earnestly.

‘Wrong? No, my dear, I hope not. Some bit of business: people for a subscription or something. I shall be back directly. Go on playing, or we shall wake your father.’

She nodded and smiled as she resumed her seat at the piano ; and as Huish went quietly out of the room, the sad strain of olden days his wife was playing seemed to grow more and more mournful when the notes were muffled by the closed door.

‘Where are the gentlemen, Jane ?’ he said quietly.

‘In the dining-room, sir,’ said the girl, with a strange look ; and as he entered she stood waiting on the mat.

One of the gas-burners was alight, and Huish started as, on entering the room, he found himself face to face with a dark, stern-looking man, and a policeman, who immediately placed his back against the door.

‘Is anything the matter ?’ said Huish quickly.

‘Well, yes, a little,’ said the stern, dark man. ‘Mr. Huish—John Huish ?’

‘Yes ; I am John Huish.’

‘Then you are my prisoner, Mr. John Huish ; here is the warrant. Smith—cuffs !’

‘Stop ! One minute !’ exclaimed Huish excitedly.
‘What does this mean ?’

‘Only the end of the little game, sir,’ said the dark, stern man. ‘Long lane that has no turning. Turning’s come at last !’

‘I do not understand you. Some mistake.’

‘Yes, sir, these matters always are little mistakes. Are you ready?’

‘No! Stop!’ cried Huish. ‘Send that man away. You need not secure me. I will go with you.’

The stern man relaxed a little, and smiled.

‘Won’t do,’ he said. ‘We’ve had too much trouble to run you down, sir. You well-educated ones are too precious clever. We’ve got a cab waiting.’

‘But my wife—my—we have company here.’

‘There, come along, sir, and get away quietly without letting them know. It’s no use trying any dodges on, because we’ve got you, and don’t mean to let you slip.’

‘Tell me at least what it means!’ cried Huish.

‘The big burglary last night, if you want to know for which little game it is ; but don’t be uneasy.’

‘My hat and overcoat,’ said Huish quickly. ‘Get me away quietly, so that they do not see upstairs. I tell you, man, that I will not try to escape you. I have only to go to the station to explain that this is a mistake.’

‘Get the gentleman’s hat and coat,’ said the

plain-clothes officer ; and the policeman opened the door so suddenly that the maid was caught listening.

‘Jane, here, quick!’ cried Huish. ‘Tell your mistress after we are gone that I am suddenly called away on business.’

‘And won’t be back to-night, my dear,’ said the officer. ‘Now, sir, are you ready?’

Huish nodded, feeling confused and prostrated by the suddenness of the seizure. For a moment he half felt disposed to resist, but he refrained, and, stepping into the hall, the girl opened the door just as Dick came up the steps.

‘Why, Huish!’ he cried in astonishment.

‘Hush!’ cried the other. ‘Not a word to Gertrude. There is some mistake. Go up to your father, and bring him round to the station. It will be a question of bail, eh, constable?’

‘Yes, sir, I should think it would,’ said the officer drily ; and, taking his prisoner’s wrist, he hurried him into the cab.

‘Then it must be all true about him, and he’s caught at last,’ muttered Dick, whose throat felt dry and lips

parched. 'Poor little Gertrude! What will her ladyship say?'

He stood thinking of what he should do as the cab rolled away, and then entered slowly, feeling that he must leave matters a good deal to chance. But the deepest-laid scheme of breaking the news would have been blown to the winds, for the maid had hurried up open-mouthed to blurt out to Gertrude that master had been took, and that they were going to handcuff him and put him to prison for burglary.

'Is this girl mad, Dick?' said Gertrude, who was trembling violently, while Sir Humphrey stood up hardly yet awake.

'Some cock-and-bull nonsense—a blunder, I suppose,' replied Dick hastily.

'But she says the police—have taken my husband.'

'They—they—they are always making these confounded blunders, my dear,' exclaimed the old man. 'There, there, be quiet, my dear. Dick and I will go and see.'

'Yes, father, I was going to propose it. John wishes us to go. There, Gertrude, don't be stupid. I've no doubt it's all right.'

‘Dick,’ she cried, catching his arm and gazing in his face ; ‘you don’t think so. There is some great trouble. What is it?’

‘I don’t know—I can’t tell; only that you are hindering us when we might be of service to John. Be a woman, Gertrude, and take all that comes as a wife should. There, there, don’t cry. I’ll come back as soon as I can.’

‘I must go with you,’ she cried. ‘If my husband is in prison my place is by his side.’

‘Yes, yes, my dear,’ said the old man querulously ; ‘that’s what they say in books, but the law won’t stand it. Come along, Dick. I say, my boy,’ he whispered, as they reached the hall, ‘it’s precious hard on me that my sons-in-law should get into such scrapes. What has John been doing?’

‘Heaven knows, father, but I fear the worst,’ whispered Dick ; but his words were heard upstairs by Gertrude, who was leaning over the balustrade, and the poor girl staggered back into the little drawing-room to sob as if her heart would break.

‘But I must be a woman and act,’ she said, drying her eyes hastily ; and ringing, she despatched the girl

with a short note to her sister, begging her to come back in the cab directly with the messenger. Then she sat down patiently to wait, after declining the cook's offer of help.

Ten minutes afterwards there was a quick ring at the bell, and the remaining servant answered the door.

Gertrude ran to the landing, and glanced down, to utter a cry of joy, for at that moment a well-known voice exclaimed roughly :

'Where is your mistress?' and she ran down to meet her husband in the hall.

John Huish seemed to Gertrude greatly excited and hurried. There was something strange, too, in his way which she could not understand, but set it down to that which he had gone through.

'Oh, John,' she began, clinging to him ; but he checked her, keeping his face half averted, and speaking in a harsh whisper.

'Hush !' he exclaimed. 'Not a word. Go down.'

This to the servant, who tossed her head at the imperative order and left the hall.

'Now,' he said, 'quick—your hat and jacket ! I have a cab waiting.'

‘Are we going out, dear?’ she said inquiringly.
‘I have just sent for Renée.’

‘How foolish!’ he cried. ‘But waste no time.’

‘Where are we going?’ she asked, wondering at his strange, impetuous manner.

‘Don’t waste time, dear,’ he cried, ‘but get ready. You shall know all as we go.’

Gertrude’s tears began to flow and half blinded her, but she hurried away to prepare herself, while Huish walked quickly from room to room, muttering impatiently. Not that there was much need, for Gertrude reappeared at the end of a minute or two, rapidly tying on her hat, to find the gas turned down.

‘I am ready, dear,’ she said, laying her hand upon his arm.

‘That’s right,’ he cried. ‘Come along!’

‘Shall I tell you how long we shall be?’ said Gertrude.

‘No, no. Come along,’ he cried impatiently, and, hurrying her out of the house, he helped her into a cab. ‘Cannon Street Station,’ he cried to the driver, and jumping in beside her, the cab rattled off.

‘Are we going to leave town, dear?’

‘You’ll soon see,’ he cried. ‘I can’t talk to you now; the cab-wheels make so much noise. Can’t you trust me?’

‘Oh yes,’ she cried, laying her hand upon his arm, ‘but you forget how anxious I am to know more.’

‘Well, well, be patient,’ he cried. ‘There, if you must know, I have been short of money.’

‘Yes, dear, of course. I knew. You forget,’ she said piteously.

‘Yes, of course,’ he replied. ‘Well, I was arrested for debt, and I have got away. We must stay in private—there, I’ll speak plainly—in hiding for a time.’

‘Oh, John dear, this is very terrible!’ she cried. ‘Why not go to Uncle Robert? He would help us, I am sure.’

‘Yes, perhaps so. We will settle that afterwards. The first thing is to get to a place of safety.’

‘Safety, John dear?’

‘Well, you don’t want me to remain in prison?’ he said.

‘Oh no, dear,’ she cried, clinging to him. ‘But, Dick—my father!’

‘What about them?’ he said sharply.

‘What did they say to you?’

‘When? How?’ he asked.

‘They came after you, dear,’ she said simply.

‘Oh yes; they are busy with the police, of course.’

She sat listening to the noise of the cab-wheels as it rattled along in the direction of the City.

Nothing more was said till the vehicle drew up, when Huish leaped out and helped her to alight. He then handed the cabman a liberal fare and exclaimed: ‘Come along, or we shall miss the train.’

He hurried her into the station, along the platform, and into the waiting-room.

‘Sit down a minute,’ he exclaimed, and he went to the door to look out, but returned directly, looking so strange that Gertrude shrank from him involuntarily, and had to make an effort to master a curious feeling of repugnance which came over her.

He drew her arm quickly through his, and, bidding her lower her veil, led her hastily out of the station, across the road and into a narrow lane.

‘Are we not going by train?’ she asked.

‘No; it is too late. Just gone. Come along, and don’t talk.’

She hurried along by his side, for he was walking very fast, and only noticed that they went through a perfect maze of narrow turnings, now up, now down, Huish stopping from time to time to look back to see if they were followed.

He kept this up for nearly an hour, and Gertrude was getting hot and exhausted, when he turned sharply into a darker and narrower lane, glancing rapidly up and down the deserted place with its two or three lamps and dimly-lighted public-house. The next moment he had thrust her into a heavy doorway, there was a rattle of a latch-key, and Gertrude felt herself drawn into a dark passage, and the door was closed.

‘John!’ she whispered, as the tremor which had before attacked her returned.

‘Safe at last!’ he muttered, drawing his breath with a low hiss, and not heeding her. ‘Tired?’

‘Rather, dear,’ she panted. ‘But, John, what place is this?’

‘My sanctuary,’ he said, in a peculiar voice. ‘Give

me your hand. Come along. I'll tell you when the stairs begin.'

He led her along the dark passage, and a strange chill of dread struck upon Gertrude. As they reached the first landing, a light suddenly shone out, and a few steps higher she gazed wonderingly at the weird figure of an old woman, with long, gray, unkempt hair, holding an ill-smelling paraffin lamp high above her head.

There was an intent, curious, inquiring look in the old woman's eyes, as they seemed to fasten upon the new-comer, gradually growing vindictive, as they passed her without a word.

'Who is that?' whispered Gertrude.

'Servant,' said Huish laconically. 'Won't make you jealous, eh?'

'John,' she whispered back in a pained voice; 'why do you speak to me like that?'

'Oh, it's only my way,' he said flippantly. 'Come along.'

They went up farther, and, reaching the second floor, Huish threw open the door of a comfortable, well-lit room, and drew her in, hastily opened the

door of communication with the next room, satisfied himself that it was empty, went on and locked the farther door leading out to the landing, and returned.

‘There,’ he said ; ‘you will be safe here.’

‘Oh yes, John dear,’ she said, gazing at him wonderingly, his manner seemed so strange ; ‘but I am so anxious to know.’

‘Yes, yes ; all in good time, dear,’ he cried. ‘There, off with that hat and jacket. Why, my dear,’ he cried, ‘you look lovely !’

There was a hot red spot in his cheeks as he spoke in a curiously excited way, and Gertrude felt a strange sense of shrinking as he hastily snatched away her jacket, threw it on a chair, and clasped her in his arms.

‘John,’ she cried, struggling to free herself, ‘look ! look !’

He loosed his grasp and turned suddenly upon a figure which stood right in the doorway, that of a tall handsome woman, looking ghastly pale, and her great eyes dilated with rage and surprise. She had evidently risen from a sick couch, and wore a long loose white dressing-gown, which, with her long dark hair flowing over her shoulders, gave her an almost super-

natural look, heightened by the silence in which she gazed from one to another.

‘What are you doing here?’ cried Huish sharply. ‘I thought you were in bed—ill.’

‘I was,’ replied the woman slowly, ‘till I heard you return.’

‘Go back to it then,’ he said brutally; ‘why do you come here?’

Gertrude shrank back towards the couch, as the woman slowly entered, with her eyes fixed fiercely upon her, and the door swung to.

‘Who is this?’ she cried, in a low angry voice.

‘Take no notice of her. I will get her away,’ whispered Huish, crossing to Gertrude’s side. ‘She is mad!’

‘No, girl, I am not mad,’ said the woman sternly; for her hearing seemed to have been sharpened by her illness, and she had heard every word. ‘John Huish,’ she said sternly, ‘answer me — who is this?’

Gertrude’s eyes dilated with horror. She was confused and startled. She could not comprehend her position or why they were there; and as the recollec-

tion of the happy evening she had spent came to mingle with the chaos of fancies and surmises that bewildered her brain, it seemed to her like some strange nightmare, from which she felt that she would soon awake into peace and repose.

To make the scene more impressive, the heavy, deep booming of a clock striking midnight floated into the room with a strange jangle of other bells, some slow, some hurried, all bent on proclaiming the same fact—that another day was dead, another being born.

As the woman repeated her question, Huish's eyes grew dark with rage, and he pointed to the door.

‘Go down,’ he said, ‘at once, or——’

She shrank from him for a moment as she saw his look ; but her jealous rage mastered her fear, and she stepped farther into the room.

Huish seemed undecided what to do ; he glanced at Gertrude, then at the woman, and then back to see that the former was looking at him imploringly, as if asking him to end the scene.

‘Go back to bed,’ he said firmly ; ‘you are ill ;’ and he laid his hand upon the woman's arm.

‘Worse in mind than in body!’ she cried, starting away. ‘Girl,’ she continued passionately, ‘you look truthful and unspoiled; tell me who you are.’

‘Oh yes!’ said Gertrude quickly, as she advanced with extended hand, and a look of pity in her face. ‘I am Mrs. Huish.’

The woman’s lower jaw dropped, and a blank, stony look came into her eyes.

‘Married!’ she said hoarsely. ‘Are you his wife—to-day?’

‘Oh no!’ said Gertrude wonderingly; ‘for some time now. You are ill and delicate. Can I do anything for you?’

‘No, no—no, no! Don’t touch me; I could not bear it. Tell me once more.’

‘Here, enough of this!’ cried Huish angrily. ‘Go down!’

‘Don’t touch her,’ said Gertrude excitedly; and she interposed. ‘She is ill—very ill. I am Mrs. John Huish,’ she repeated.

‘The woman he has wronged?’

‘No, no!’ said Gertrude, beginning to tremble, as

she thought of the scene upon the stairs; 'but you are——'

'That man's lawful wife, whom he now casts aside for some pretty baby face that takes his fancy.'

'It is not true!' cried Gertrude with spirit; 'my husband is a gentleman and the soul of honour.'

'It is true! and that man is a liar—a cheat—a scoun—O God, I cannot bear it! Let me die!'

The woman threw up her hands and reeled. In another instant she would have fallen, but Huish stepped forward, caught her in his arms, and bore her out of the room, carrying her down to the next floor, while Gertrude, as she heard his receding steps, sank into a chair, and gazed blankly before her.

She started up though, as Huish returned with a smile upon his face, and closed and locked the door.

'Poor thing!' he said lightly; 'I am sorry she came up. Ill, you know. Her baby. Reason temporarily gone. She accuses everybody like that.'

'John,' cried Gertrude, trembling, 'I cannot understand you to-night: you are so strange and unlike yourself. Is what that poor creature says true? Oh, I cannot bear to hear such words!'

‘True? is it likely?’ he said, approaching her.
‘Why, are you not my little wife?’

‘Yes, yes!’ cried Gertrude, shrinking from him ;
‘but tell——’

She stopped short, gazing at him wonderingly. Her hands went to her dilating eyes, and as the light of the lamp fell for the first time full upon him now, she uttered a cry of horror, her face became convulsed, and she ran to the door.

‘It is not——’ she paused wildly.

‘Are you mad, too?’ he cried, pursuing her and catching her wrists.

‘Yes—no—I don’t know,’ she cried excitedly.
‘Don’t touch me. I cannot bear it.’

‘Silence!’ he cried. ‘Do you want to alarm the house?’

‘Oh no, no!’ she panted ; ‘but you frighten—you horrify me!’

‘Hush! Be silent!’

‘No, no!’ cried Gertrude, struggling, as he again seized her in his arms. ‘Oh, help—help—help!’

CHAPTER II

POLICE BUSINESS.

DICK MILLET became quite the military officer as he reached the police-station with his father, and proved that, if he possessed a very small body, it contained plenty of soul. He was staggered at the charge brought against his brother-in-law, that of being a party to a serious attempt at burglary on the previous night, and soon found that there was nothing to be done till the next day. He listened to Huish's asseverations of innocence very quietly, but said nothing till he exclaimed :

‘ Why, Dick, you cannot believe me guilty of this monstrous charge !’

‘ I can only believe one thing just now, John Huish,’ he replied ; ‘ and that is that you are my dear

sister's husband, and that for her sake everything possible must be done to help you out of this dreadful scrape.'

'Yes,' cried Sir Humphrey feebly, 'of course—of course. And, John, my boy, I always liked you; it's a cursed impertinent lie, isn't it?'

'It is indeed,' cried Huish earnestly; 'unless—unless——'

He stopped, gazing from one to the other in a curiously bewildered fashion.

'Unless—unless what, my boy? Why don't you speak out?'

'Let it rest to-night, sir,' said Huish, in an altered voice. 'I am confused—shocked. Get me some good advice to-morrow, Dick, and when the examination comes off, you will, of course, find bail.'

Dick nodded, but did not shake hands.

'I'll do everything I can,' he said sternly.

'Won't you shake hands?'

'No,' replied Dick, 'not till you are cleared. Huish,' he said in a whisper, 'I shall work day and night to clear you, for Gerty's sake; but I've heard

some blackguardly things about you lately. This, though, is worse than all.'

Huish turned from him, looking dazed and strange, to shake hands with Sir Humphrey, who began protesting to and scolding the inspector on duty.

'I—I—don't believe a word of it,' he cried angrily. 'You—you—you police fellows are always—yes, damme, always making mistakes of this kind, and—and, confound me, if I don't have the matter brought before the House of Lords. Good-night, my dear boy; make them give you everything you want, and we'll be here first thing in the morning.—It's—it's—it's about the most disgraceful thing I ever knew, my dear Dick,' he said as soon as they were in the street; 'but if you don't take me on to the club and give me some supper I shall faint.'

'You must be sharp, then, father. Gertrude will be horribly anxious.'

'Yes, yes, poor girl, she will; but it will be all right to-morrow. I'm not so strong as I was, and this has upset me terribly.'

There was no doubt about it, for the old gentleman looked very haggard. A hearty supper, however,

restored him, and he left the club in pretty good spirits to accompany Dick to Westbourne Road, where they were met by the announcement that 'master came back a bit ago, and went away with missus.'

'What does this mean?' said Dick sternly.

'Mean, my boy? Why, that he has got bail.'

'I'm afraid not,' said Dick to himself, and, with the full belief that his brother-in-law had contrived to escape, he accompanied his father home, keeping, however, his thoughts to himself.

In the morning, however, there was the news that a message had come for her ladyship to go to Wimpole Street, where Mrs. Huish had arrived on the previous night.

'Was John Huish there, too?' asked Dick sharply.

'I did not hear,' said her ladyship haughtily. 'I know nothing of such a person, and I will not have my name sullied by mention in connection with his.'

'But you'll go and see Gertrude?'

'No,' exclaimed her ladyship. 'It was Gertrude's duty to come to me if she were in trouble. If she

prefers her uncle's help, let her enjoy it. I have no more to say, except that I shall not go; and, Humphrey, I forbid you to go there—for the present.'

'And me, too,' said Dick quietly.

'You have long ceased to obey me,' said her ladyship austerely, 'and must take your own course. I will not, however, be dragged into this dreadful scandal.'

'Humph!' said Dick. 'Then you let it all out, father, after you'd gone to bed?'

'Yes, my son, yes. Your mamma was very anxious, and I told her all.'

'As you like. I'm off now to secure counsel. We'll have him out before night.'

Lady Millet sighed and wiped her eyes, but no one paid any heed to her, so she consoled her injured feelings with a good breakfast.

Meantime, John Huish sat through the night, thinking, and calling up from the past all the strange things that had been laid to his charge.

'What does it mean?' he said aloud. 'Am I a

madman or a somnambulist, or do I lead a double life ?’

It was terrible, that being shut up in such a place ; for when the other prisoners were silent, there was a dreadful clock close by, which seemed in its cold, harsh, brazen way to goad him to distraction. It was a hurried clock, that always seemed manifesting itself and warning people of the flight of time, so that every quarter of an hour it fired off a vicious ‘ting-tang’ in the two discordant notes that made a bad descending third, repeating itself at the half-hours, tripling at the third quarter, and at the hour snapping as it were at the world four times before allowing the hammer on another bell to rapidly go off *slam—slam—slam*, till its duty was done. ‘Clocks are bad enough,’ he thought, ‘from the warnings they give of how short our lives are growing ; but when a man is in trouble and bells are added, the effect is maddening indeed.’

He sat trying to think till he was bewildered, and at last, in a complete maze, he sat listening to the noisy singing of a woman in the next cell, and the drunken howlings of a man on the other side.

‘My poor darling!’ he cried at last; ‘it will almost break her heart. A burglary! and if they should prove that I was guilty—oh, it is monstrous!’

He tried to pace his cell, but it was too narrow, and he sat down again with his hands pressed to his forehead, with the mental darkness coming down upon him thicker than that of his cell.

‘It’s like some nightmare,’ he said at last, ‘and as if in some way my brain were unhinged. Absence—absence of mind! My God! will a judge believe me if I say for defence that I committed a robbery in a fit of absence of mind? One has read of strange things in people’s lives,’ he thought after a time—‘how they have been totally unconscious of what took place in one half of their existence. Is it possible that my life is divided into two parts, in each of which I am ignorant of what passes in the other? But who would believe it! I’ll have Stonor here first thing to-morrow.’

He sat with his mind growing darker and darker, and vainly struggling against the black oppression; and at last, with a weary wail, he exclaimed unconsciously:

‘My poor darling, what a night for you! Last

night happy and admired—to-night—oh, thank God—thank God!

For the light had come.

The police declared that the burglary had taken place the previous night about nine o'clock at a City house, and that he was seen and nearly captured. Why, a dozen people could prove that he was at Dr. Stonor's the whole evening.

He rose and tapped sharply at his cell door.

'Now then,' said a rough voice. 'What is it?'

'Kindly ask the inspector to come here for a moment,' said Huish.

The officer on night duty came from his desk where he had been entering the last charge. 'Well, sir?' he said, with official brevity.

'Sorry to trouble you,' said Huish, 'but that burglary—when was it?'

'Nine o'clock last night—that is, the night before last, for it is now four o'clock.'

'Thank God,' said Huish, and he lay down upon that peculiarly soft bed provided by a humane Government at police stations for arrested people, and slept soundly for hours.

‘ Precious eager to know when the crack was done,’ said the officer, as he looked in at the cell. ‘ Clever dodge—going to try an *alibi* ?’

What was intended for a preliminary examination took place in the course of the afternoon, and the officer in charge of the case brought forward two or three witnesses to give a sufficiency of evidence to justify a remand, informing the magistrate that he believed that he should be able to produce a long catalogue of crime against the prisoner, who had succeeded in eluding the vigilance of the police for some time past.

On the other side, however, the services of the rising young counsel, Mr. Douglas, had been secured. He made a brief and indignant address to the magistrate on the way in which the sanctity of Mr. Huish’s home had been invaded, and a gentleman dragged off to answer this disgraceful trumped-up charge. In conclusion, Mr. Douglas said he should bring forward witnesses whose social position was such that their testimony must be taken as unimpeachable, and they would prove on oath that at the time when this gentleman—the defendant ; he would not insult him by

calling him the prisoner—was stated to have been seen by the police in company with some notorious scoundrels engaged in a burglary—his worship would excuse him for smiling, the charge was so absurd—Mr. Huish was partaking of the hospitality of a well-known physician at his house at Highgate.

‘Call Dr. Stonor.’

Dr. Stonor stepped into the witness-box, was sworn, and stated that Mr. John Huish often dined with him at Highgate, and was there on the night in question, that he arrived there about seven, and did not leave till twelve, and was never out of his sight the whole time.

Daniel Repson, Dr. Stonor’s confidential servant, testified to the same effect.

Then Sir Humphrey Millet was sworn, and stated that he called at his son-in-law’s at six o’clock, and went up with him in the carriage to Highgate, and was set down at Grosvenor Square on the return. He certainly did have a nap after dinner, for about half an hour, but not for more.

Mr. Richard Millet gave similar testimony, and lastly Miss Stonor was sworn, and stated that, saving

the interval between leaving the table and tea-time, she saw Mr. Huish the whole evening.

Mr. Douglas was of opinion that after the evidence of these witnesses his worship would dismiss the contemptible charge, and tell his client that he left the court without a stain upon his character. At the same time, he hoped the police would be more careful, for he was informed that Mrs. Huish had been most terribly alarmed, and that the consequences might be serious.

The police-sergeant was checkmated, and the prisoner was discharged at once, leaving the police court in the company of his friends.

‘Yes,’ said the sergeant grimly, ‘he has done us this time ; but if we don’t put salt on his tail yet, I’ll leave the force.’

John Huish shook hands heartily with the doctor, who eyed him rather curiously, and then turned to Dick, who was, however, very distant.

‘You’ll come home with me,’ he said ; but Dick shook his head.

‘Not now,’ he said coldly ; ‘another time. Come, father.’

The old man shook hands heartily with his son-in-law, and whispered :

‘ Dick’s a bit put out, my dear John ; but it’s all right. I’ll put it all straight. I’ll bring him on to-night.’

Huish nodded, and shook hands then with the doctor and Miss Stonor.

‘ Good-bye, doctor ; a thousand thanks ! Miss Stonor, you’ll excuse me. I am most anxious to get home.’

Miss Stonor nodded and smiled, and Huish was turning away, when the doctor said :

‘ Run up and see me again soon.’

Huish nodded assent and turned away, hailed the first hansom, and jumped in, the man smiling at him in a friendly way.

‘ Home, sir ?’ he said.

‘ Yes, quick. West——’

‘ All right, sir—I know,’ cried the man, and away went the cab.

‘ Driven me before,’ thought Huish, as he sank back in the cab. ‘ Poor little darling ! how she has been upset !’

He lit a cigar and smoked it, to settle his nerves as

he termed it, and then his thoughts turned to the affairs of the past night.

‘And suppose I had not been able to bring all those witnesses to prove my innocence,’ he thought. ‘How horrible!’

He moved about uneasily in his seat, for he was not satisfied. This was, after all, but another link in the strange chain of circumstances that had troubled him, and he shuddered and threw away his cigar, for his nerves refused to be settled. Somehow, a strange uneasy feeling kept increasing upon him, and at last he raised the little trap and shouted to the man to go faster.

‘Suppose she is ill!’ he muttered. ‘Poor darling! what she must have suffered!’

At last the cab was pulled up at the door, and Huish leaped out and ran up the steps without paying the man, who waited, while, not finding his latch-key, he rang sharply, and the cook answered the door.

‘Where is your mistress?’ he said sharply.

‘Missus, sir? I haven’t seen her since last night.’

‘What, has she gone home?’

‘Home, sir? I don’t know, sir—I mean, since you fetched her, sir.’

‘Since I fetched her, woman! Are you mad?’

‘Not as I knows on, sir,’ said the woman, with the asperity of one in her profession. ‘You ast me where missus was, and I says as I ain’t seen her since you fetched her last night.’

‘Since I fetched her last night! You mean the night before, to go out to dinner—Dr. Stonor’s.’

‘No, sir, I don’t; I mean the very last night as is, ’bout half an hour after you was took.’

‘Yes, yes; go on,’ said Huish, turning ghastly pale.

‘You come back and told missus quite sharp like to put on her things, and took her away in a cab.’

‘Are you—dreaming?’ faltered Huish, staggering back against the wall.

‘Dreaming! no, sir, of course not. And the poor dear got ready in a minute, and you both went off in a cab.’

‘This is horrible!’ groaned Huish. ‘I never returned till now; I did not come and fetch her.’

‘ Begging your pardon, sir, which you’ve forgot,’ said a voice behind him ; and Huish turned round to find himself face to face with the cabman.

‘ Like me to wait, sir ? Didn’t pay me my fare. It was me as drove you and the lady last night.’

‘ You !—what ?—me ?—the lady ?’

‘ Of course, sir,’ said the man, smiling. ‘ You hailed me in Praed Street, outside the station, and come on here, and you told me to wait. Five minutes arter you comes out with the lady, and I took you down to Cannon Street.’

‘ This is horrible !’ groaned Huish again ; and he clutched at the umbrella-stand to save himself from falling.

‘ The gent’s ill,’ said the cabman hoarsely.

‘ Yes, ill—ill,’ cried Huish ; ‘ no—better now. Tell me, both of you, did I come last night and fetch my wife ?’

‘ Course you did, sir,’ said the cook in an injured tone, as if insulted at her veracity being impeached.

‘ If I might make so bold, sir,’ said the cabman, ‘ I’d have a drop o’ short ; it’s nerves—that’s what it

is. I get a bit touched so sometimes, after being on. Shall I drive you to——’

‘A doctor’s?—yes,’ groaned Huish. ‘Quick!—to Dr. Stonor’s, Highgate.’

‘Highgate, sir? Hadn’t you better go to one close by?’

‘Quick, man!—to Highgate,’ cried Huish. ‘Here.’

He thrust a sovereign into the man’s hand, and ran down the steps to the cab.

‘Right, sir,’ cried the cabman, running after him and climbing to his perch. ‘Lor!’ he muttered as he started the horse, ‘how willing a suv. do make a man, toe be sure!’

It seemed an age before the cab had climbed the long hill, and all the time John Huish sat back hatless, and holding his head with both his hands, for it throbbed as though it would burst. Two or three times over he thrust up the trap to urge the man to hasten; but during the latter part of the journey he sat back, fighting hard to restrain himself, for he felt that if he moved or spoke more he would begin to shriek and utter wild drivel. He was going mad—he was sure of it—and his mind would no longer bear the

horrible strain of the bewildering thought. There was something wrong, and he could not master it. One sole thought now filled his mind, but in a hazy, strange way, and that was that he, in some other state, had fetched away his wife and destroyed her.

At last, just as they neared the top of the hill, he became aware for the first time that the cabman was watching him, and he started angrily as the trap was shut down.

‘Poor gent! he have got it hot,’ muttered the cabman; and he gave his horse a touch with the whip, which made the weary beast exert itself a little more, and a few minutes later they were at the doctor’s iron gates.

‘Shall I wait, sir?’ said the man.

Huish shook his head and jumped out, to ring furiously at the bell.

Daniel came down the path to meet him.

‘I thought so,’ he muttered, as he saw the excited looks of the visitor; and he offered Huish his arm, for the young man staggered as the gate swung to.

‘The doctor—quick!’ said Huish, with his eyes looking staring and wild.

‘ In his study, sir—only just back from town,’ said Daniel ; and he helped the tottering visitor quickly into the house, across the hall, and at once into the doctor’s room.

‘ Why, John—Huish, my dear boy, what is this ?’

‘ Possessed—of a devil—doctor,’ cried Huish thickly.

‘ For Heaven’s sake—help me—I’m going mad !’

He sank back into an easy-chair gasping, and his face turned blue with the congestion of his veins ; then he babbled hoarsely a few unintelligible words, and became insensible.

‘ Basin—quick !’ said the doctor ; and as his ready *aide* ran to a little mahogany stand, the doctor’s pocket-book was opened, a tiny steel blade glittered for a moment, and directly after the dark stream of John Huish’s life-blood was trickling from a vein.

CHAPTER III.

POTIPHAR'S WIFE.

CLOTILDE seemed to find little difficulty after her return from the Continental trip in settling down into her new position in life. She made plenty of mistakes, no doubt, but Elbraham's notions of management were so far from perfect that he proved to be no fair judge. His ideas were that his young wife should keep plenty of company, dress well, and do the honours of his house in excellent style.

As far as display was concerned, this she did ; and, Elbraham being nowise opposed to the plan, she frequently had Marie to stay with her. In fact, her sister would have quite taken up her abode at Palace Gardens had Clotilde carried the day ; but though she pressed her constantly, talked of her own dulness

in town, and made various excuses for keeping Marie at her side, the latter refused to remain there long.

Still, Marie was frequently at Palace Gardens, and whenever she was staying in town Lord Henry Moorpark made frequent calls, and was always pressed by Clotilde to return to dinner.

The old gentleman smiled his thanks, and accepted the invitations with no little sign of pleasure ; but he made no farther advance in his suit, and seemed to resign himself calmly to his fate, and to be content to bask, so it appeared, in Marie's presence ; she, for her part, always being kindly affected towards her elderly friend. The officers from Hampton Court, too, were frequent guests at Palace Gardens, dining there in state, but never when Marie was staying with her sister.

‘I wonder,’ said Clotilde, rather archly to Glen, ‘that you do not try and exchange troops, so as to be stationed at Kensington instead of Hampton Court. I see some of your regiment is here.’

‘Yes,’ said Glen carelessly ; ‘but really, Mrs. Elbraham, I think I like Hampton Court better than Kensington.’

Clotilde bit her lip, but she showed no further sign of annoyance, and the conversation changed.

Had Glen been a vain man, he would have been delighted at the evident desire Clotilde now displayed for his company ; but there was little vanity in his composition. He told himself that he would treat her as if she had never made the slightest impression upon him ; and as, he could hardly tell why, he felt a kind of awakening interest in Marie, who he knew had refused Lord Henry Moorpark, he gladly accepted all invitations, in the hope of seeing more of Marie at her sister's house, but only to be disappointed.

Still, he encountered her occasionally at Hampton, sometimes at Lady Littletown's—now and then in the gardens, for their intercourse to be of the most distant kind if the Honourable Philippa was present ; but friendly—almost affectionate—if it were in the presence of the Honourable Isabella alone.

For the poor lady, failing to make any impression upon Glen, felt a kind of gentle satisfaction in administering to his pleasure. She saw how eager the young officer and her niece were to meet, and this, like a pale beam of reflected light, tended to brighten

her own sad life, so that she smiled and sighed and palpitated gently, telling herself, as her trembling hand wandered about the plaits of her old-fashioned dress, that it was very sweet to see others happy.

So great was her enjoyment that often and often, as Glen and Marie, with Ruth for companion, strolled up and down, poor Isabella Dymcox would take her place upon one of the seats, saying that she was rather tired, and shed a few sad tears, which trickled down her withered cheeks, almost unknown to the dreaming author of their being.

It came upon Glen like a surprise on the night of Mrs. Elbraham's grandest 'at home' to find that Marie was there; and after being welcomed by his host and hostess, the first very warmly, and the second with a searching look in her eyes, a strange sense of pleasure came over him on seeing Marie standing near, looking, it seemed to him, more handsome than he had ever seen her look before.

There was a dreamy, anxious look in her eyes as they encountered his, and her gloved hand certainly conveyed a trembling, tender pressure when he first shook hands, so that when at last he left her side, he

began asking himself whether it was possible that he had been making a mistake, and casting away a living substance for a false deluding shadow.

‘Nonsense!’ he said impatiently, as the hot blood seemed to rush through his veins. ‘I can’t be so frivolous.’ Then, with a half-laugh, ‘Broken hearts are not so easily mended, and Marie can only feel a sort of pity and contempt for a fellow who preferred her sister.’

But somehow in the course of the evening his eyes encountered Marie’s from time to time, and, as far as he could judge, there was neither pity nor contempt in them, but a genuine look of tender regard which took him again and again to her side.

Yes; he felt before he came that he liked Marie, and that it was quite possible for a nearer tie than liking to grow up between them in the course of time, but this evening a veil of denseness seemed to have fallen from his eyes, and he read a score of looks and ways in quite a new light.

He hesitated for a while when once or twice he found himself near Clotilde, who seemed to affect his society a good deal that evening, and almost imperiously summoned him with a look to her side.

He went almost gladly, for there was a new sense of joy in his breast. He felt that he was triumphing over the young wife, and yet it was the pitying triumph of a great conqueror who could afford to be merciful; and this feeling grew as he glanced at the splendidly-attired, handsome woman ablaze with diamonds, and then at her coarse, common-looking elderly husband, who, with his round head down between his shoulders, kept bustling about among his guests, like a society showman displaying the beauty of the bejewelled woman he had placed in a gilded cage.

‘I can afford to be merciful now,’ thought Glen. ‘Good heavens! what a blind fool I have been! Why, she is worth a thousand Clotildes, and I was a fool not to see her superiority before!’

He paused just then to ask himself whether he were not still blind and foolish with conceit, for why should Marie care for him? But just then his eyes caught hers, and an electric glance made his pulse throb and hopes run high, as he told himself that it was no conceit upon his part, but the truth, and that after all he had not really loved Clotilde.

‘No, my dear madame,’ he said to himself; ‘it was

a fancy such as a weak man like your humble servant is prone to indulge in. Yes,' he continued, and there was a faint smile on his lip as he caught sight of Clotilde just then watching him; 'I thank my stars that I escaped your wiles. You are as handsome a woman as I ever met, and I certainly thought I loved you, but, by Jove, what an escape I have had!'

Glen's thoughts were in his eyes, upon which Clotilde's were fixed, but she did not interpret them aright; not even when he gazed at her almost mockingly, as if asking her if she were satisfied with her choice, to which he bade her welcome.

'By Jove, what will Dick say?' thought Glen, as he saw the little fellow cross to Marie. 'Poor boy! Well, he will have to get over it, just as he has got over a score of other tender passions. And I thought he said he was in too much trouble about his sisters to think of matrimony for himself.'

The rooms grew more crowded, and Glen longed to cross to Marie's side, but somehow he was always prevented, save for one five minutes, when Clotilde was by the entrance receiving some new arrivals. Those five minutes, though, were five intervals of joy

during which very little was said, but that little was enough to endorse most fully without a positive declaration the ideas that had so lately begun to unfold.

The evening wore rapidly on. Marie was standing by the piano talking to little Dick Millet, and her eyes met those of Glen gazing at her across the room.

He was about to answer the summons they seemed to convey, when Lord Henry Moorpark, looking exceedingly old and yellow by the light of the chandeliers, but gentlemanly and courtly as ever, rose from his seat and crossed to where Marie stood, entering into conversation, as in his sad and deferential way he seemed to have set himself to hover about in the presence of the woman he loved.

‘A very, very bright and pleasant party, my child,’ he said tenderly. ‘I hope you are enjoying it.’

‘Oh, so much!’ cried Marie, darting a grateful look in his eyes. For it was so noble and good of him, she told herself, and she felt that she quite loved the tender-hearted old nobleman for the generous way in which he had seemed to sink his lover’s love in that of a guardian for a child.

‘Yes, it is bright and pleasant,’ continued Lord Henry; ‘but I feel very much out of place here, and as if I ought to be quietly sipping my glass of port at my club. How noble your sister looks, and how happy!’

‘Noble, indeed!’ said Marie eagerly. ‘She is very handsome, and I hope she is happy.’

‘Indeed, I hope so too, my child; but here comes some one else to take my place.’

For as he was speaking, Glen, who felt that if he did not make an effort he would have no further speech with Marie that night, was coming to her side, but only to be captured and carried off in another direction.

‘Then I need not go yet,’ said Lord Henry, who was watching the little comedy through his half-closed eyes, ‘unless I go and relieve guard, and set Captain Glen at liberty.’

‘Oh, no, no!’ whispered Marie, whose face betrayed her mortification. ‘It would look so particular.—Clotilde saw him coming to me,’ she added to herself, ‘and it was done in spite.’

‘Perhaps it would,’ said Lord Henry quietly. ‘I

like Captain Glen. He is very manly and handsome. The *beau ideal*, to me, of a soldier. I must know more of him, and of his amusing little friend yonder, who is pointing his moustaches and looking daggers in my direction. He is another admirer of yours, is he not, Marie?’

‘Oh, poor boy: it is ridiculous!’ exclaimed Marie, half scornfully. ‘There is something very likeable about him, too, except when he is in his foolish fit.’

‘His foolish fit?’ said Lord Henry inquiringly.

‘Yes, and tries to talk nonsense. I was compelled to dismiss him, and forbid his coming near me unless he could talk sensibly.’

Fresh announcements were made from time to time, and then a servant approached Clotilde, who immediately began to pair off her guests for the supper.

‘Take in Marie, dear Lord Henry,’ she said as she came to where they were standing; and soon after, in passing, she said softly to Glen, ‘I shall reserve myself for you.’

Glen bowed, and waited patiently as the guests went down to the banquet spread in a large marquee

set up in the garden, where beneath the red and white striped awnings the brilliant swinging gasaliers turned the glass and lustrous plate upon the long tables into a blaze of scintillations, which illumined with fresh tints the abundant flowers.

Elbraham had given Edgington and Gunter orders to 'do the thing handsome,' and they had unmistakably carried out his wishes, even to his own satisfaction; while, to give an additional charm to the supper, the strains of an excellent band, concealed behind a great bank of flowers and plants of the gayest foliage, suddenly began to float through the great marquee.

'It is like a scene in fairyland,' said Clotilde, as Glen took his seat beside her, and after she had glanced down the table to see that the little squat figure of Elbraham was hidden from her gaze by a line of épergnes and jardinières.

'Yes, it is magnificent,' replied Glen gravely and with his eyes fixed upon Marie, seated some little distance below them in company with Lord Henry Moorpark, the former gazing at him in a half-reproachful way.

‘I made Elbraham invite you,’ whispered Clotilde, sipping the champagne that had just been poured into her glass.

‘Indeed!’

‘Yes; of course, I shall have all my old friends here as much as I please.’

‘I suppose so,’ said Glen rather dreamily. ‘Of course, you are very happy?’

She darted a quick look at him, one that he did not meet, for he bent over his plate and appeared to be busy with his supper.

‘How dare you say that to me!’ she said in a low voice. ‘Oh, it is too cruel—and from you!’

Glen shuddered, for he half expected that his hostess’s words would be heard.

‘I beg pardon,’ he said hastily. ‘I will take more care.’

‘No, no,’ she said, in the same deep, earnest tones: ‘scold me, say cutting, contemptuous things to me. I am a wretched creature, and deserve all.’

Glen seized and emptied his champagne-glass at a draught, and as he set it down he glanced towards the opening in the marquee, as if seeking a way to escape.

An awkward pause followed, and, judging that his companion was self-angry at her slip of words, Glen was magnanimous enough to try and pass them over, changing the conversation, or rather trying, by a dexterous movement, to draw it into another channel.

‘Where did you go?’ he asked.

‘When? During my wedding trip?’ she asked, with a curious tone of bitterness in her voice.

It was a badly-planned question, Glen felt, but he must go on with it now.

‘Yes. Paris, of course?’

‘Oh yes, we went to Paris and Berlin, and then through Switzerland, I believe; but it was all one miserable dream.’

She had spoken almost loudly, and the blood mounted to the young officer’s cheeks as he again wondered whether her words had been heard. But he need not have been uneasy, for those nearest were intent upon their plates or upon each other.

‘You are very angry with me,’ said Clotilde suddenly; and for a moment he caught her eye, and asked himself directly after whether Marie had seen

that glance, which she had, and suffered a raging pang.

‘Angry? No,’ said Glen lightly, ‘why should I be angry, Mrs. Elbraham? Surely a lady has a right to make her own choice. I was a competitor; and an unfortunate one.’

‘Do you think you were unfortunate?’ asked Clotilde eagerly.

‘As unfortunate as you were favoured; why, my dear Mrs. Elbraham, you are here the mistress of a palace. Had I had my way, you would have been condemned to share some shabby barrack-lodging. Hence I congratulate you.’

‘Ah!’

Glen’s face flushed more and more. It might have been from the long-drawn, half-despairing sigh on his left; or the champagne, of which he pretty freely partook in his excitement, might have been answerable for his heightened colour, but certainly he did not go the way to diminish it, for he drained the glass at his side again and again, dashing off into a hurried conversation and talking brightly and well, till he heard a fresh sigh upon his left, and encountered

another glance from his hostess's large dark eyes—a look full of reproach and appeal.

This time Glen smiled. The wine was working, and he saw matters from another point of view.

Throwing off, then, the consciousness that had troubled him, he laughed and chatted with her till his words or the wine brought a warm flush into her creamy skin, and again and again he received a languishing look from the large dark eyes—a look that would have made some men turn giddy, but which only made Glen smile.

The party at last arose and began to file back into the brilliantly-lit saloons, the band having now been stationed in the flower-filled hall, and an improvised dance commenced, a couple beginning to turn to the strains of one of Gungl's waltzes, and a dozen more following suit, agitating the perfumed air, and filling it with the scintillations of jewels.

They passed from the great marquee into the hall, the strains of the waltz making Glen long to go to Marie and ask her to be his partner for that dance.

He was thinking this when he was brought back to himself by the low, sweet voice of Clotilde.

‘You are *distract*,’ she said half reproachfully.

‘Yes. I was thinking of the music,’ he said. ‘I want a waltz.’

‘No, no,’ she said hurriedly ; and she pressed his arm. ‘I must not dance to-night. Take me in this way.’

She pointed to a door and they passed through into the great conservatory, softly lit up by tinted globes placed amidst the flowers and foliage of the rich exotics that filled the place. There was a delicious calm there, and the air was fragrant with the cloying scents of flowers ; musical with the tinkle of falling water as a jet flashed in many-tinted drops and sparkled back into a fern-hung basin ; while as if from a distance came the softened strains of the voluptuous waltz.

It was a place and a time to stir the pulses of an anchorite, and yet Glen hardly seemed to heed the beautiful woman who hung heavily and more heavily upon his arm, till he said suddenly—

‘Is not this the way?’

‘No, along here ; let us go through this door.’

‘This door’ was one at quite the end, leading into

a kind of boudoir ; but ere they reached it, and as they were nearly hidden by the rich leaves and flowers, Clotilde turned to her companion with a low, piteous sigh—gazing wildly in his eyes. ‘ Oh, Marcus, why did I marry that man ? ’

CHAPTER IV.

GLEN'S DEFENDER.

MARCUS GLEN could hardly recall exactly what happened upon that unlucky night ; but Clotilde's words rang still in his ears, and even as they seemed to throb in his brain, there was a burst of light that seemed to cut the semi-darkness where they stood—the boudoir doors being thrown open—and with the light came a burst of conversation and music from the inner rooms.

Those sounds seemed to be mingled with the furious oath uttered by Elbraham, who was upon the step with Lord Henry Moorpark, and Marie close behind.

It was like some situation in a comedy drama, and before he could recover from his surprise he felt a

sharp blow across his face, and a tiny jet of blood spurting from the puncture made by the point of a brilliant where it had entered his temple.

‘How dare you! Elbraham! Husband! Protect me from this man.’

‘Protect you? By G— I will,’ roared the financier, throwing his arm round his wife’s waist, whilst, flushed and angry, she began to sob.

‘That man—that wicked man! Oh, it is shameful!’

‘Look here, Moorpark,’ cried Elbraham savagely, as Clotilde, after gazing furiously at Glen, hid her face upon her husband’s shoulder, ‘you are a witness. By G— I’ll have an action against him—I’ll have him in the Divorce Court. I’ll——’

‘Hush, hush, my good sir!’ whispered Lord Henry, who looked for the moment horror-stricken, but recovered directly sufficiently to close the door leading into the great conservatory.

‘But I’ll—but I’ll——’ cried Elbraham, foaming at the mouth with rage and jealousy.

‘Hush, sir, pray : for your wife and her sister’s sake,’ said Lord Henry, with dignity.

‘But,’ panted Elbraham, struggling to speak, and shaking his fist at Glen, who stood there biting his lip, and frowning.

‘Silence, sir!’ cried Lord Henry with authority; ‘recollect you are a gentleman. Captain Glen, I beg and desire that you leave this house at once.’

‘Gentlemen!’ exclaimed Glen, flushing with excitement; and the words of explanation were upon his lips, but he stopped short and took a step as if to go, but turned back. ‘Look here, Lord Henry,’ he said.

Then he stopped short, choking, sickened with disgust. He could not—he would not speak.

‘You had better leave at once, Captain Glen,’ said Lord Henry haughtily. ‘There must be no scandal here. You have insulted——’

‘Insulted!’ panted Elbraham; ‘by G—, sir——’

‘Mr. Elbraham, for your own and your lady’s sake be silent and calm yourself, or the guests will learn what has occurred. If you demand satisfaction afterwards, sir, you can do so, though duels are out of fashion.’

‘Satisfaction!’ cried Elbraham. ‘By G— I’ll have heavy damages—heavy damages!’ he reiterated, with

the foggy notion still in his brain that this was a case in which he could proceed against Glen in the Divorce Court.

‘We will discuss that afterwards, sir,’ said Lord Henry coldly. ‘Mrs. Elbraham, there are some of your guests approaching. Marie, my child, lead your sister into the next room ; she has been a little faint. Elbraham, recollect yourself.’

‘All right, my lord ; I’m calm enough. But let this blackguard go at once.’

Glen started, and he was turning furiously upon the financier, when he saw Marie slowly approaching her sister with a look almost of loathing in her countenance, and he took a couple of steps towards her.

‘Marie, for heaven’s sake hear me !’ he whispered ; but even as he spoke he saw Clotilde turn and glare at him with so fierce a look that he was again silenced.

Then Lord Henry threw open the door, the strains of music and the brilliant light flashed into the conservatory, and Clotilde seemed to recover herself, and laid her hand upon her husband’s arm.

‘Take me away,’ she said hoarsely ; but, seeing

that Marie did not move, she restrained her lord, whose face was just turning back from purple to red, and seemed to be waiting for her sister to leave.

‘Will you take me back into the drawing-room, Lord Henry?’ said a voice then that sounded quite strange to all present, and mastering her emotion, but looking deadly pale, Marie suffered Lord Henry to lead her away without one glance at Glen, who stood there feeling as if a hand were constricting his throat.

The next moment Elbraham favoured him with a melodramatic scowl, and marched out with Clotilde’s white arm resting, laden with glittering bracelets, upon his black coat-sleeve, and her face fixed, as if of marble, as she gazed straight before her.

‘He will not betray me,’ she thought to herself, ‘and he will forgive me the next time we meet.’

She might have altered her opinion if she had heard his words, though perhaps they would have made her feel more satisfied as regarded her own position.

‘Curse the woman for a Jezebel!’ cried Glen between his teeth, as he clutched a handful of the rich leafage of a palm and crushed it in his fingers.

'Was ever poor wretch meshed before in such a net? If ever I forgive her this—— Well, what is it?'

'Alone!' cried Dick. 'I thought I saw Marie come in here while I was dancing.'

'Yes,' said Glen, trying to crush down his emotion; 'she did come here, and she is gone.'

'For a *tête-à-tête*. Curse it all, Glen! you are too bad. Have some honesty in you!'

'Hold your tongue!' said Glen, bringing his hand down fiercely upon the boy's shoulder, which he clutched with so tremendous a grip that the lad winced and uttered a cry of pain. 'Don't speak to me. Take me back.'

'Are you ill? What is the matter? There's blood on your face. Hang it all! you hurt me. What has been wrong? Has Marie refused you?'

'Will you be silent?'

'No,' said the boy with spirit; 'I will know. I saw Marie come in here. What has happened? Have you been playing some——'

'Rehearsing only!' cried Glen, with a forced laugh.

'Rehearsing! Are they going to have amateur theatricals?'

‘No, no : real—a social comedy,’ cried Glen.

‘A social comedy ! I say, old man, haven’t you had too much champagne ? But are they going to act something ? I should like to be in it. What is the piece ?’

‘The scapegoat !’ cried Glen, with a laugh ; ‘and I play the goat.’

‘Look here, old man, I’ll see you into a cab. Let’s get out this way. I’ve a couple more dances I must have before I go. I wouldn’t go back into the drawing-room if I were you. Come along.’

With his senses seeming to reel, Glen took the arm offered to him, and allowed himself to be led out into the hall, Dick helping him on with his coat and seeing him in a hansom before returning to the drawing-room, where the band was playing another waltz.

He intended to find Marie and secure her for a partner ; but the dance was nearly ended before he found her, looking, as he thought, more beautiful than ever, but very strange, standing in a doorway with Lord Henry, who was holding her hand.

Something seemed to check the boy, as a pang of jealousy shot through his fervent young heart. He

could not hear what was said, but stood still in mute rage as Lord Henry said :

‘Indeed, yes, my dear child ; everything. There shall be no hostility. Fighting is a thing of the past. Take my word for it, and be at rest.’

‘Thank you, Lord Henry, thank you,’ she said, almost passionately. ‘Good-night. I will go to my room now ; I can bear no more.’

‘God bless you, my child. It must be hard to bear, but you are noble and good and true enough to master this bitterness. I would I could bear it for your sake Good-night.’

‘Good-night,’ she said warmly.

‘And you will try to forget it all?’

‘I have forgotten it,’ she said, flushing and drawing herself up proudly. ‘It was one of my mistakes.’

She looked full in his eyes as she spoke, and then drew her hand from his, and he stood watching her cross the hall and ascend the staircase till she reached the first landing, where she turned and looked down at him for a moment before passing out of his sight.

Lord Henry Moorpark stood with his eyes half

closed, thinking of the bright vision that had just glided from his sight ; and his thoughts must have been pleasant, for he smiled once, and stood opening and shutting his crush hat till, becoming aware that someone was near, he raised his eyes, and saw Dick pointing his tiny moustache.

‘ Ah,’ he said, smiling ; ‘ there is music yonder, and pretty feet and bright eyes are asking for partners. Why tarryeth the little son of Mars ?’

‘ Look here !’ cried the boy fiercely ; ‘ if you were a man of my years—oh, this is unbearable !’ he cried, and he hurried away.

‘ Poor boy !’ said Lord Henry softly ; ‘ and I am spoiling his happy dream. Ah, well, it was one from which he was bound to be rudely awakened, and Marie——’ He paused, and his eyes half closed. Then he said the name softly to himself : ‘ Marie, Marie ! Poor child ! she looked heartbroken. Am I a doting old fool to ask myself this question—shall I win her yet ?’

It would be hard to say who suffered most in the sleepless night which followed, during which Glen paced his bedroom till day, the same daybreak that

found Marie, wakeful and feverish, turning upon her weary couch.

That morning a note came for her. Elbrahim received it and took it to Clotilde.

‘It is from that wretch,’ she cried hotly ; ‘burn it.

Elbrahim did so without a moment’s hesitation, and the ashes were still sparkling on the hearth when Marie entered the drawing-room dressed as if for a journey.

‘Why, Rie!’ exclaimed her sister, as Elbrahim recalled the past night’s scene and felt uncomfortable.

‘I am going back to Hampton,’ said Marie quietly and without heeding her sister’s extended hands ; and on reaching home the honourable sisters were loud in their questions, and full of surprise to see her back, but Marie was reticent. She was not quite well ; she was tired with the effects of the party ; and she did not think Clotilde wished her to stay longer.

‘But Clotilde must give way in such cases. It is her duty to study her sister now that she is well married.’

For the first time in her life Marie saw herself as she was, and at night, when the cousins were alone,

and Ruth had been helping her to undress, the latter was startled into a belief that Marie was ill and delirious, for soon after she had dropped into her usual calm and peaceful sleep she was awakened by her cousin, looking strange and pale in her long white robe and with her black dishevelled hair about her shoulders.

‘Are you ill, dear?’ cried Ruth, starting up.

‘Yes, so ill—so ill!’ moaned Marie; and Ruth clasped her affectionately in her arms, to find her eyes wet with tears, and her hands like ice.

‘What is it?’ whispered Ruth; ‘let me call aunts.’

‘No, no, let me stay here; lie down again, Ruthy: I want to talk to you.’

‘But you are ill, dear!’ cried Ruth.

‘Only in mind, Ruthy. There, lie still, hold my hands and let me lay my head by yours; I want to talk.’

To Ruth’s surprise, Marie sank upon her knees by the bedside, clasped her in her arms, and laid her cheek upon the pillow.

‘There,’ continued Marie, ‘I can talk to you now;’ and to the wondering girl’s astonishment she sobbed

hysterically, asking for her sympathy and love. 'For I have grown to hate myself, Ruth—to be ashamed of what I am. I'd give the world to be like you.'

'Oh, Marie, Marie,' sobbed Ruth, 'pray, pray don't speak of yourself like that! I have tried so hard to love Clotilde, but she has been cruel to me, I never could; but you—you have always been kind, and I do love you. You always took my part.'

'So that I might be a tyrant to you myself, you foolish child,' said Marie bitterly. 'Oh, Ruth, Ruth, Ruth! if we had had a mother by our side I should have been a different woman.'

'There is something wrong, Marie; I can see it in your face.' And she hurriedly began to dress.

Then, and then only, did Marie give way to her feelings, sobbing with hysterical rage till Ruth was alarmed, and clung to her, begging her to be calm.

By degrees the whole bitter story came out, Marie keeping nothing back, but pouring forth the tale of her wrong with all an injured woman's passionate jealousy and despair.

She did not notice how by degrees, as she went on,

Ruth had grown white as ashes, and had gradually loosened her arms from round her, edging slowly away till she stood there with her arms hanging listlessly at her side, and in this attitude she listened to the bitter, passionate declarations of her cousin.

‘I wish I was dead!’ cried Marie. ‘I thought him so true, and manly, and honest, and yet he could be guilty of so cruel, so foul a wrong; and oh, Ruth, Ruth! I loved with all my heart—loved him as I hate and despise him now.’

She started and looked wonderingly at her cousin, and asked herself whether this was the gentle, yielding girl who had been her and her sister’s butt and victim these many years, for as she finished Ruth’s ashy face became suffused with anger.

‘It is false! It is a cruel lie!’

‘It is true, you foolish child!’ retorted Marie angrily.

‘I tell you it is false!’ cried Ruth. ‘Captain Glen is too true and noble to be so wicked as you say. I will not believe it. I do not care; I would not believe it unless he stood here and owned to it himself. I know it is cruel and wicked to say so, but it

is Clotilde who is to blame. Marcus Glen loves you, and he would not do you such a wrong.'

'You are too young and innocent, Ruth,' said Marie coldly. 'Good-night. It is only the wakening from another dream.'

CHAPTER V.

THE REWARD OF PERSEVERANCE.

PAUL MONTAIGNE made Ruth shudder with a look, and told her aunts that they had only to wait, for Lord Henry would again propose.

He was right.

‘If your aunts did not object, Marie, it is a delicious evening for a stroll round the Gardens,’ said Lord Henry Moorpark, as they stood in the drawing-room looking at the black shadow cast by the full moon across the little court where the jets of water gurgled and plashed, and the few gold-fish sailed round and round, gaping and staring with their protuberant eyes like so many Elbrahams running their mill-horse round in the search for wealth.

‘I don’t think I should object, sister, if Marie would like to go,’ said the Honourable Philippa.

‘I do not think I should mind, sister,’ said the Honourable Isabella. ‘And besides, Joseph might walk behind them, as he does when we go for a walk.’

‘Joseph will be busy,’ said the Honourable Philippa tartly. ‘Ruth dear, would you like to accompany your cousin?’

‘If you would excuse me, aunt, I should prefer to stay,’ said Ruth humbly, and with a lively recollection of the snubbing she had once received for eagerly embracing a similar offer.

‘Would dear Lord Henry mind taking Marie unaccompanied by anyone else?’ said the Honourable Philippa; and Lord Henry said he should only be too charmed to take her alone.

Marie had been sitting with a half-contemptuous smile upon her lip, but as Lord Henry turned to her she rose and left the room, to return shortly with a large scarf thrown over her head and round her neck.

The old man gazed wistfully at the beautiful figure, and uttered a low sigh. Then, rising, the couple left the room, Lord Henry saying that they would not be

long; and, descending, they crossed the court and made their way into the gardens, confining themselves first to the broader walks, talking of the beauty of the night, the lovely effects of light and shadow in the formal old place, whose closely-clipped angularity was softened by the night.

Marie said but little, listening in a quiet, contented frame of mind while Lord Henry made comparisons between the gardens and park and those of Versailles, Fontainebleau, and other places he had visited abroad.

‘You would like to travel, would you not?’ he said, looking at her inquiringly.

‘I used to think it would be one of the greatest joys of existence,’ she replied; ‘but somehow of late I have felt content to stay as I am.’

‘Always?’ he said sadly.

‘Yes. I don’t know.—Lord Henry,’ she whispered, in a quick, agitated manner, ‘take me away from here. Let us go back.’

He was startled by her energy, and for the first time saw that they were not alone, for there in the bright moonlight were a couple of officers sauntering

along, evidently in ignorance of the proximity of Lord Henry and his companion.

‘Do you wish Captain Glen to see you, Marie?’ said Lord Henry, with a shade of bitterness in his voice.

‘Why do you ask me that?’ she retorted.

‘You see,’ he replied coldly, ‘we are in the shadow, and if we remain here they will pass on without noticing us.’

‘Let us stay,’ she said; and they remained upon the velvet turf beneath a row of limes whose shadow was perfectly black; and as they rested silent and watchful there, they saw the two young men pass slowly in the silvery moonlight, talking carelessly till they were out of sight.

‘Youth against age,’ mused Lord Henry, as he stood gazing after the young officers. ‘Why am I so weak as to cling to this silly sentiment? At my time of life I should be a wiser man. I visit, I talk, I bring her presents, I pour before her all that is rich in an old man’s love, and she is kind and gentle, but unmoved. Then comes youth, and his presence even at a distance works a change in her such as I have

never seen when I have tried my best to win her regard. Ah well! I should respect her the more for her honesty. Our hearts are not our own, and, poor child! she loves him still.'

He started from his reverie to see that Marie was standing beside him, gazing along the broad path at whose end the officers had disappeared.

'Marie,' he said softly; and he took her hand, but she did not move, and the hand was very cold.

'Marie,' he said again; and she started back into the present.

'Lord Henry!' she faltered.

'We are alone here, my child, and I can speak to you plainly. You know how long and well I have loved you. Let me tell you now that the old man's love is stronger and truer than ever, but it is blended with something better, and is richer than it was before. Marie, my child, I would give all I possess—yes, even the last few years of my life—to see you happy. Shall I try to make your life a happy one?'

She looked at him calmly, and laid her other hand upon his as he clasped her right.

'Yes, Lord Henry,' she said, 'if you will.'

‘I will, my child,’ he said earnestly. ‘God giving me strength, I will do all I can to make you happy.’

‘Thank you,’ she said.

‘The scene on that dreadful night, my child, has never been cleared up. You have never fairly heard all. You love Captain Glen still, and he may have a very good defence for what we unfortunately saw. Shall I fetch him back to you now? I will be as your father, as his judge; and if I say he can give a satisfactory explanation, you shall forgive him.’

Marie had misunderstood him at first, but now his words were clear, and she started from him in passionate anger.

‘See him—speak to him—listen to his perjuries again—never!’ she cried. ‘Take me home. No words of his could ever undo the past.’

‘Be calm, my child,’ he whispered, ‘and listen. This young heart beats for him still. Let me fetch him. There may be grounds for forgiveness even now.’

‘Lord Henry!’

‘Appearances are deceitful,’ he said, interrupting her. ‘Let me try to make you happy. Believe me,

I have your welfare so at heart that I would sacrifice myself for your sake.'

She grew calmer as she listened to his words, and when he had ended, laid her hand again in his.

'You do not know me yet,' she said softly. 'I will speak out now without fear and shame. I did love him, Lord Henry. Heaven knows how dearly I loved him when he passed me over for my sister; and when she treated him so heartlessly, my love for him seemed to grow the stronger. When he turned to me at last, I thought that life would be one long day of joy.'

She paused, and Lord Henry watched her with a growing reverence in his face.

'Then came that dreadful night,' she continued, 'and all was at an end. The old love is dead, Lord Henry, and what you have seen to-night was but the agitation such a meeting would produce. Take me home now—take me home.'

'No,' he said tenderly; 'you are agitated, my child. Let us walk a little longer. Marie,' he continued, as he held her hand in his, and made no attempt to move, 'I once asked you to be an old

man's wife. I told you to-night how your happiness is mine. Forgive me if I ask you again—ask you to give me the right to protect you against the world, and while I remain here to devote my life to making yours glide happily, restfully on. Am I mad in asking this of you once more?’

She did not answer for some moments, but when she did she laid her other hand in his, and suffered him to draw her nearer to him till her head rested upon his shoulder.

Marie went straight back to her room and sat down to think, with her face buried in her hands, till she felt them touched, when she started up, and found her cousin gazing at her questioningly. She told Ruth all, the communication almost resulting in a quarrel, for the girl had fired up and accused her of cruelty.

‘You are condemning him and yourself to misery,’ she cried, ‘and I will speak. Oh, Marie, Marie! undo all this; I am sure that some day you will be sorry for it.’

‘You foolish child,’ said Marie, kissing her affectionately. ‘Oh, Ruthy, I wish we had known more

of each other's hearts. You are so good in your disposition that you judge the world according to your own standard.'

'Oh no, no, I do not!' cried Ruth. 'I only speak because I am sure Captain Glen is too good and honest a gentleman to behave as you have said.'

'Perhaps so,' said Marie coldly, as she caressed and smoothed Ruth's beautiful hair. 'But you must not let this advocacy of yours win you too much to Captain Glen's side.'

'What do you mean?' cried Ruth, flushing.

'I mean that he is not to be trusted, and that it would be a severe blow to me if I found that you had been listening to him, as might be the case, when I am not near to take care of and protect you.'

'Oh, pray, Marie!' cried Ruth, with her face like crimson, 'don't talk like that. Oh no, no! I could never think of anyone like that if he had been your lover, Marie, which he is.'

'Clotilde's lover—my lover—your lover—any handsome woman's lover. Oh! Ruthie!' said Marie scornfully, 'let us be too womanly to give him even a second thought. There, it is all over. Dear Lord

Henry was so tender and kind to me,' she continued lightly. 'He was as bad as you, though, at first.'

'How as bad as I?' said Ruth.

'He wanted to fetch that man to give place to him. To make me happy, he said.'

'There!' cried Ruth excitedly; 'and he is right. Lord Henry is so wise and good, and he must know.'

'He is one of the best and noblest of gentlemen,' said Marie, throwing back her head and speaking proudly, 'and I'll try to make him the truest and best of wives.'

'But, oh, Marie! don't be angry with me, dear,' cried Ruth, clinging to her; 'think a moment. Suppose—suppose you should find out afterwards that you had misjudged Captain Glen.'

'Hush!' cried Marie; and her face looked so fierce and stern that Ruth shrank from her. 'Never speak to me again like that. I tell you, it is dead now—my love for him is dead. You insult me by mentioning his name to Lord Henry's affianced wife.'

Ruth crept back to her to place her arms tenderly round her neck, and nestle in the proud woman's breast.

‘I do love you, Marie,’ she said tenderly ; ‘and I pray for your future. May you, dear, be very, very happy!’

‘I shall be,’ said Marie proudly ; ‘for I am to marry one whom I can esteem, and whom I shall try to love.’

Ruth wept softly upon her cousin’s breast for a few minutes, and then started from her and wiped away her tears, for there were footsteps on the stairs.

The reign of coldness was at an end, and the honourable sisters had their hearts set at rest by the announcement Lord Henry had been making to them below.

He had sat for some time in silence, and the subject was too delicate for the ladies to approach. They had been about to summon Marie to return, but he had smiled, and suggested that she should be left to herself.

Then the Honourable Philippa’s heart had sunk, so had the heart of the Honourable Isabella, whose mind was in a paradoxical state, for she longed to see and hear that Captain Glen was happy ; and to have added to his happiness she would have given

him Marie's hand at any moment, but at the same time it made her tremble, and the tears rose to her dim eyes whenever she dwelt upon the possibility of another becoming his wife.

A pause had followed, during which Lord Henry had rested his elbow upon the table and his head upon his hand, and there, with the tears hanging on the lashes of his half-closed eyes, and as if in ignorance of the presence of the sisters, he sat thinking dreamily, and smiling softly at the vacancy before him in the gloomy room.

The Honourable Philippa felt that her hopes had been once more dashed, and that Lord Henry had that night proposed and been refused.

'May I send you some tea, Lord Henry?' she said faintly.

'I beg your pardon, dear Miss Philippa, dear Miss Isabella,' he cried, starting up with a sweet smile upon his face and the weak tears in his eyes. 'I was so overpowered by the enjoyment of my own selfish happiness that I could think of nothing else.'

'Happiness?' faltered the Honourable Philippa; and her sister's hand trembled about her waist as if

she were busily trying to unpick the gathers of her antique poplin gown.

‘Yes, my dear ladies,’ he said, ‘happiness ;’ and he took and kissed in turn their trembling hands. ‘Our dear Marie has accepted me, and with your consent, as I am growing an old man fast, and time is short, we will be married quietly almost at once.’

The Honourable Philippa sank back agitated *à la mode*. The Honourable Isabella sank back feeling really faint and with a strange fluttering at her heart, for, like some mad dream, the idea would come that, now his suit with Marie was perfectly hopeless, Captain Glen might yet say sweet words to her.

It was a mad dream, but it lasted for some hours. It lasted till after Lord Henry had bade them affectionately farewell, and they had gone up to the young girls’ room, and Marie had been kissed and blessed with prayers for her happiness.

It lasted, too, until the honourable sisters had retired for the night ; and somehow the joyous feeling of hope that had been deferred so long would keep rising brighter and brighter in the Honourable Isabella’s breast. By the light of that hope she saw

the manly, handsome face of Marcus Glen smiling upon her, as he came and told her that it was not too late even now, and that Ninon de l'Enclos was quite venerable when she loved.

It was very pleasant, and an unwonted flush burned in her face—just such a flush as appeared there when she tried some of that peculiar white paste belonging to Lady Anna Maria Morton, which, applied to the cheeks, turned them of a peachy red.

‘It is very foolish of me,’ she murmured, in quite a cooing voice; ‘but I don’t know: Lady Anna Maria is going to be married to a young and handsome husband, so why should not I?’

Poor little lady! She was finishing her night toilet as she thought all this, and then it was time to put out the lights.

There were two—an unwonted extravagance—burning, one on either side of the little old-fashioned toilet-glass, and with a smile of satisfaction she paused to look at herself before extinguishing the candles.

There was but little vanity in her composition, and it left room for a great deal of latent affection. As she gazed into the old glass the extinguisher dropped

from her hand ; she uttered a pitiful cry, and sank into a chair sobbing and bewailing her lost youth.

‘No, no, no!’ she sobbed; ‘he could never love such a dreadful thing as that!’ And as she sat there the candles burned down, one to drop out at once, the other to flicker and dance in a ghostly way, but the Honourable Isabella heeded it not, for she was assisting at the interment of her love.

‘He could never love such a one as I,’ she said to herself; and as she sat there in the cold and darkness, her thin hands pressed one upon the other, her heart seemed to ask her who there was for Captain Glen to love; and as she asked herself the question the soft, innocent face of Ruth rose before her, and seemed to be looking gently and kindly in her eyes as she dropped asleep.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOUBLE KNOT.

As Gertrude Huish, wild with horror and half mad as she realized that there was something which she could not comprehend about the man who had clasped her in his arms, raised her voice in a loud appeal for help, steps were heard upon the stairs, and there was loud knocking.

‘Go in there!’ was whispered hoarsely, and trembling with the great dread which had come upon her she escaped from the hands which held her, rushed through an open door and shut it to and locked it before she stood alone in the darkness, ready to swoon away.

It was horrible! Those rumours about John Huish which she had proudly refused to believe—were they,

then, all true? That woman had claimed him for her husband, and what, then, was she? And then his manner—the coming of the police—his conduct to her!

‘God help me!’ she half cried. ‘It is not he—it cannot be! What is to become of me? What shall I do?’

Yes; that was it. That explained the feeling of loathing she had felt when he clasped her in his arms. At other times her arms had stolen round his neck, her lips had clung to his; while now this man seemed half mad, his breath reeked of spirits, and he horrified her. Was it really, then, all true—that her husband had a double life, or was this some horror in his place?

Her position was maddening, and she felt at times that her reason must give way as, with hands extended, she felt her way in the intense darkness about the little bedroom till her hands rested upon the second door, which, like the first, was fast.

She remembered now that he had entered the room, locked the door, and removed the key, so that she was a prisoner in the utter darkness, where at

last she threw herself upon her knees and prayed for help and guidance in her sore strait.

She rose up at last strengthened and calmer, feeling that she must escape and get back home at any cost. No, to Uncle Robert, who would help her; for she dared not, after leaving home as she did, face Lady Millet now.

Then, as she pressed her head with her hands, she felt confused and strange. Her brain swam, and she told herself that she must not go.

One o'clock—two o'clock had struck, and still she sat there in the darkness, with her brain growing more and more bewildered; and then she started to her feet and a cry rose to her lips, for there were footsteps without, and they passed the door and entered the next room.

Then as she stood listening to the heavy beating of her heart there was the harsh scratching noise made by a match, and a gleam of light shone beneath the door.

What should she do? He was coming again, and an insane desire came upon her to seek for the window and cast herself out—anything to avoid meeting him now.

At last, when the mental agony of suspense was more than she could bear longer, the door was suddenly opened, the light shone in, and a low hoarse cry of horror subsided into a wail of relief, for there stood the same woman, pale, even ghastly, holding a candle above her head, and with a dull, angry look upon her countenance as she entered the room.

‘Well,’ she said harshly, ‘are you satisfied?’

‘I don’t understand you,’ said Gertrude eagerly, as she crept towards her; ‘but you are a woman. Pray, pray help me to get away from this dreadful place. For indeed it is dreadful to me,’ continued Gertrude, catching at the woman’s hand, but only for her to snatch it angrily away.

‘You don’t know it as I do,’ she said, ‘or you would call it a dreadful place. Don’t touch me: I hate you!’

‘No, no, I never injured you!’ cried Gertrude piteously. ‘Oh, as you are a woman, help me! Here, look, I will reward you. Take this.’

She hastily detached her watch and chain, and held them out.

‘Pah!’ exclaimed the woman, ‘what are they to

me? I've seen him and them bring scores of them, and rich jewels, diamonds and pearls—I'm sick of them; and do you think I would take that from you?'

'Why not?' cried Gertrude. 'Oh, have you no pity for me?'

'Pity? Pity for you! Why, are you not his wife?'

'Yes, yes, yes, but you cannot understand. I cannot explain. Help me to get away from here. I must go—to my friends.'

'Go? To your friends?' said the woman, looking perplexed. 'What, have you quarrelled already?'

'Oh, do not ask me—I cannot tell you,' cried Gertrude piteously; 'only help me to escape from here, and I will pray for you to my dying day.'

'What good's that?' said the woman mockingly. 'I'm so bad that no one could pray me good. I'm a curse and a misery, and everything that's bad. Pray, indeed! I've prayed hundreds of times that I might die, but it's no good.'

'Have you no heart—no feeling?' cried Gertrude, going down upon her knees.

‘Not a bit,’ said the woman bitterly. ‘They crushed one and hardened the other till it all died.’

‘Let me pass you then!’ cried Gertrude angrily. ‘I will not stay.’

‘If I let you pass, you could not get away. The doors are locked below, and you could not find the keys. You don’t want to go.’

‘What can I say—how am I to tell you that I would give the world to get away from here?’ cried Gertrude. ‘Oh, for Heaven’s sake save me before he comes again!’

‘He will not come again. He is downstairs drunk. He is always either drunk or mad. And so you are the new Mrs. John Huish?’

‘Yes, yes!’ cried Gertrude; and then wildly, ‘Tell me, it is not true? You—you—cannot be his wife!’

‘The parson said I was when we were married—Mrs. Frank Riversley.’

‘Ah!’ cried Gertrude joyously.

‘Sometimes,’ continued the woman, as if she enjoyed torturing her rival; ‘lately he has called himself John Huish—since he has neglected me so much to go to clubs and chambers.’

‘Oh!’ sighed Gertrude.

‘But I never complained.’

‘I cannot bear this,’ moaned Gertrude to herself; and then, fighting down the emotion, she crept upon her knees to the woman and clasped her hand.

‘Let me go,’ she moaned. ‘Let me get away from here, and I will bless you. Ask anything of me you like, and it shall be yours, only get me away.’

‘You don’t want to go,’ said the woman mockingly. ‘It’s all a sham.’

‘How can I prove to you that I mean it?’ cried Gertrude.

‘I don’t know; I only know that if I did he would kill me.’

‘Oh no, no; he dare not touch you. Come with me, then, and I’ll see that you are not hurt.’

‘Are you in earnest? Better not. I ought to be in bed now—sick almost to death. Better stay,’ she said mockingly. ‘This may kill me. I hope it will, and then you can be happy—with him!’

‘No! no! no!’ cried Gertrude wildly. ‘Never again. I did not know. It is too dreadful! Woman, if you

hope for mercy at the last, help me to get away before I see that man again.'

'That man? that man?'

'No, no,' cried Gertrude wildly. 'I cannot explain. It is too dreadful! He is not my husband. He is like him, but he is not him. I don't know what I am saying. I cannot explain it. Only for God's sake get me away from here, or I shall go mad!'

The woman stood gazing at her piercingly as Gertrude cast herself at her feet.

'You do mean it, then?' she said at last.

'Mean it? Yes. I have been deceived—cheated. This man is—— Oh! I don't know—I don't know,' she cried wildly; 'but pray help me, and let me go!'

The woman gazed down at her for a few moments longer, and then said huskily, 'Come!'

Gertrude caught at the hand held forth to her, and suffered herself to be led out on to the landing, and then slowly down the dark stairs of the old City mansion in which they were, till they stood in the narrow hall, where, reaching up, the woman thrust her hand into a niche and drew out a key, and then set down and blew out the light.

Gertrude stood trembling, and she clung to the hand which touched her.

‘Afraid of the dark?’

‘No, no! But pray make haste; he may hear.’

‘No. He hears nothing after he has taken so much brandy. He was wild with the other lodgers for interfering; and when he is wild he drinks till he goes to sleep, and when he wakes——’

She did not finish her sentence, but led her companion to the door, unlocked it, and the next moment the cool dank air of the night was blowing upon Gertrude’s cheek, as she dashed out into the narrow street, flying like some hunted beast, in the full belief that the steps she heard were those of the man who could not be the husband whom she loved.

CHAPTER VII.

BETWEEN SISTERS.

‘ I WISHED to do everything for the best, my child,’ said Lord Henry Moorpark. ‘ I did not like the idea, but Elbraham pressed me to come, and for your sake, as Mrs. Elbraham is your sister, I gave way. I wish you had spoken sooner. We have not dined with them since we have been married.’

It was too late then, for they were in the carriage on the way to Palace Gardens. But the dinner-party was not to pass off without trouble, for after the ladies had left, and while Lord Henry was fighting hard with a bad cigar, sipping his coffee and listening to his brother-in-law’s boastings about the way in which the money market was rigged, the butler entered softly, and whispered something to Lord Henry, who rose on the instant.

‘Anything wrong, Moorpark?’ said Elbraham, in his coarse, rough way.

‘Only a call for me,’ cried Lord Henry hastily. ‘Pray sit still, and do not let my absence interfere with your enjoyment.’

‘All right; come back as soon as you can,’ cried Elbraham; but by that time Lord Henry was in the hall, for the butler had whispered to him that her ladyship had been suddenly taken ill.

To Lord Henry’s astonishment, he found Marie in the hall, hastily drawing a long scarf round her neck and over her head.

‘Take me home,’ she whispered hoarsely, as he hurried to her side.

‘My darling! are you ill?’ he cried.

‘Yes. Very ill, take me home.’

‘Had I not better send for medical help at once?’

‘No, no. Home! home!’ she whispered, as she clung to his arm.

‘But the carriage, my darling? It will not be here till after ten.’

‘Let me walk. Take a cab. Anything; only get me away from this house,’ she whispered imploringly;

and there was that in her face which made Lord Henry send at once for a cab ; and it was not until they were in it, and on their way to their house in St. James's, that Marie seemed as if she could breathe.

She had thrown herself into his arms as soon as they were in the cab, excitedly bidding him tell her that he trusted her, that she was his own wife, and ended by such a hysterical burst that he grew alarmed, and was about to bid the driver stop at the first doctor's, when she seemed to divine that which he intended to do, and gradually grew calmer.

Hereupon he was about to question her, but at his first words the symptoms from which she suffered seemed ready to recur, so he contented himself with holding her hands in his, while she lay back with her head upon his shoulder, every now and then uttering a piteous moan.

The ladies had ascended to the drawing-room that evening, and as soon as they were seated alone there, Marie felt that she had made a mistake in coming.

The memory of the evening of the 'at home' came

back very vividly, try how she would to drive it away, and whenever she glanced furtively at Clotilde, she seemed to be gazing not at her sister, but at the woman who had done her a deadly injury.

She fought against this feeling, but it seemed to strengthen, especially as Clotilde kept smiling in a triumphant way—so it seemed to her; and Marie shivered as she felt that she was beginning to hate this sister of hers.

It only wanted Clotilde's confession to seal the growing feud, and make Marie's dislike grow into hate indeed.

'How little we see of each other now, love!' began Clotilde. 'I thought, dear, that when we were married we should be inseparable. Is it my fault?'

'My husband is very fond of quiet,' said Marie. 'We go out but seldom.'

'Poor old gentleman!' said Clotilde mockingly. 'I hope you nurse him well.'

Marie started, but she said nothing, and Clotilde went on:

'Isn't it nice, dear, to be one's own mistress, with plenty of money at one's command, and as much

jewellery as one likes? Do you remember how we used to long for it all?’

‘Yes, I remember,’ replied Marie, sighing in spite of herself.

‘You remember? Yes, and you sigh about it. Why, Rie, you ought to be as merry as the day is long. Lord Henry is a dear old fellow. How much older, though, he seems than Elbraham! I say, Rie, wouldn’t you like to change?’

‘The conversation?’ said Marie. ‘Yes; certainly.’

‘No, my dear, not the conversation, but husbands. Poor old Rie! I rather pity you, for Lord Henry is decidedly slow.’

‘Clotilde,’ said Marie, with dignity, ‘Lord Henry Moorpark is my dear husband and your guest. The way in which you are speaking of him gives me pain.’

‘Pain? Why, Rie, what stuff you are talking—and to me! Heigho! it seems very hard upon us that we should have had to marry these wretched old men, instead of such fellows as—say Captain Glen’

‘How can you speak like that, Clo!’ cried her sister, flushing. ‘I beg you will be silent.’

‘Beg, then,’ retorted Clotilde, with a resumption of her old schoolroom ways. ‘Who cares? I shall talk as I like.’

‘Do you think it is respectful to your husband or your duty as a woman to speak of—of—that man as you do.’

‘Oh yes,’ replied Clotilde carelessly. ‘Why not? I liked Marcus Glen ever so.’

‘Clotilde! for heaven’s sake be silent. Think of your position—of what you are. Your words are terrible.’

‘Terrible? What, because I said I liked Marcus Glen? Why, so I do. He’s a splendid fellow.’

Marie’s eyes sought the door, but they were quite alone, and she glanced back at her sister with a look of disgust and annoyance painted upon her face in vivid colours.

‘Oh, there’s no one to hear us, and I don’t mind what I say before you, Rie. You won’t go and tell tales. You dare not. I say dare,’ she continued, with a malignantly spiteful look in her countenance. ‘You were fond of Marcus Glen, weren’t you?’

Marie did not reply, but sat there with an outraged look upon her face, and Clotilde smiled to herself, and

her eyes glittered with malicious delight as she went on :

‘Do you know, Rie, I have a good mind to quarrel with you to-night, as I have got you here.’

‘Quarrel with me? Why should you do that?’ said Marie quietly.

‘Oh, for a hundred reasons, my sweet sister. For one, because it is so long since you and I had a good scold. For another, because it was so underhanded of you to hold back when dear aunties wanted us to marry well.’

‘Don’t be foolish, Clo!’ said Marie. ‘Let us talk of something else.’

‘Yes, we will by-and-by, my sweet sissy; but it was shabby of you to let me marry my old man, and then take advantage of my being fast to make up to my former beau.’

‘Can such talk as this benefit either of us?’ said Marie, flushing. ‘Surely it is beneath your dignity as a wife to speak as you do.’

‘Dignity? Pooh! Women who marry as we have done, for money, have no dignity—they have sold it.’

‘Clotilde!’

‘Well, it’s quite true, and you know it. Trash! As if we either of us ever had any. It was nipped in the bud by our dear aunts. No, my dear Rie, we have no dignity, either of us. Slaves have no such commodity. We are only white slaves, the property of the dreadful old men who took a fancy to us and bought us!’

‘For heaven’s sake, Clo, be silent,’ cried Marie, who had to fight hard to keep down her agitation. ‘This is cruel!’

‘Well, what if it is? Why should you not feel it as well as I? You hate and despise your husband as much as I do mine, and though you are so quiet and so shy, Rie, you mean to take your revenge; and why not?’

‘I do not understand you,’ exclaimed Marie.

‘Bah! That you do, and I know it. I am not so mad as to believe in your smooth ways and sham fondness for that old man.’

‘Clotilde, I will not sit and listen to you,’ cried Marie. ‘Your words are disgraceful.’

‘Better speak plain than be smug and smooth and secretive, you handsome hypocrite! There, it won’t

do, Rie. You may as well drop the veil before me. All this wonderful show of modesty and mock devotion is thrown away.'

'Are you going out of your senses?' said Marie hoarsely.

'Half-way,' was the reply. 'It is enough to madden any woman, to be sold as I was.'

'You accepted Mr. Elbraham of your own free will,' said Marie indignantly, 'and it is your duty to remember that you are his wife.'

'Is it?' cried Clotilde angrily, and speaking as if she were fanning her temper to raging point. 'I know what my duty is to my slave-owner better than you can tell me, madam ; but, clever as you are, you did not keep out of the marriage mess.'

'What do you mean ?'

'What do I mean?' cried Clotilde, who was excited with the wine she had drunk, and her desire to sting her sister to the quick. 'Why, you did not suppose I was going to sell myself for a position and let you hang back and marry the man I loved.'

'The man you loved?' said Marie, turning very pale.

‘Yes, the man I loved—Marcus Glen. He loved me, and you knew it, and hung back always, with your soft, cat-like ways, trying to win him from me.’

‘It is not true,’ cried Marie.

‘Yes, it is, and you know it is true. That’s why you refused Lord Henry at first, so that you might win Marcus, as you thought. Do you think I was blind?’

‘Clotilde,’ said Marie, ‘this is terrible to me! Did you ask me here to-night to insult me?’

‘Not I, my dear, only to congratulate you on being such a good, dutiful girl, and obeying our sweetly-affectionate, care-taking, washed-out old aunts. It is so pleasant to see you like I am, and well out in society. I meant that you should be, and so you are. Why, you are ever so much better off than I am—Lady Henry Moorpark. I ought to rise and make obeisance to you, but I am too lazy. But to set aside joking, you ought to be highly grateful, and kiss me for what I have done.’

‘I do not understand you,’ said Marie, unconsciously playing with her wedding-ring.

‘Why, I brought you to your senses, silly child!’

‘Brought me to my senses!’ exclaimed Marie, fighting down an intense desire to rise and leave the room.

‘To be sure, my dear ; I have quite taken to dear aunts’ worldly ideas of what is right for girls to do. You know I did my duty, as they laid it out for me ; and then, when I saw my silly sister hang back and spend her time in making eyes at the penniless officer I could not afford to marry, I said, “This will not do. I love dear Marie too well to let her make a fool of herself. She shall marry Lord Henry Moorpark, or I’ll know the reason why.”’

‘You are talking folly,’ said Marie huskily.

‘Perhaps so, Rie ; but you did not marry my Marcus, and you did marry Lord Henry. Yes, that’s the golden link of your slavery, sweet sister,’ she said as she saw Marie touch her wedding-ring ; ‘but how dutiful you must feel ! Haven’t seen Marcus lately, have you ?’

Marie made no reply.

‘You don’t believe me,’ continued Clotilde maliciously. ‘It was very funny how it all turned out. Do you remember the night of our party ?’

Did she remember it ! The recollection was burned into her brain.

‘Poor Marcus !’ continued Clotilde, ‘he is a great goose of a fellow. How astonished he looked !’

Marie was white and red by turns, and the place seemed to swim round before her ; but she fought hard to hide her feelings from her sister’s malicious eyes.

‘I must do him the justice to say that he behaved very well on the whole.’

‘Clotilde, you must be mad,’ said Marie hoarsely. ‘If you were in your right senses, you would not speak like this.’

‘Oh yes, I would, my dear,’ laughed Clotilde. ‘I am no more mad than you are ; but I was determined that you should never marry Marcus Glen, and I kept you apart.’

‘It is false,’ cried Marie excitedly. ‘I threw him over for his reckless conduct with you.’

‘You threw him over because I made you, my dear,’ said Clotilde contemptuously. ‘Do you think, Marie, I was going to sit still here as Elbraham’s wife, and see you marry Marcus ! No, my dear, that I would not do.’

Marie was like stone now, and she remained motionless, while Clotilde lay back in her lounge and continued her shameless avowals.

‘I wanted to spite you a little, darling, in a kindly sort of way, and I could not have behaved better to you than to help you do your duty to our dear aunts and win a rich husband and a title.’

‘Is this talk for some purpose?’ said Marie at last, angrily.

‘Yes, my dear, of course it is; but you must be very smooth-faced and quiet now, and not let the gentlemen see that we have been talking about our old beaux. But seriously, Rie, you never thought I should sit down quietly and let you carry off Marcus Glen?’

Marie began to tremble, for a horrible suspicion had assailed her, one which moment by moment grew more strong; while, seeing the effect of her words, Clotilde went on with malicious glee:

‘It would not do at any cost, my dear, so I carried off poor stupid Marcus that night.’

‘This was your doing, Clotilde,’ said Marie at last, panting as if for breath.

‘To be sure it was. Poor old fellow! He behaved very nicely by holding his tongue and taking all the blame, when he was as innocent as a lamb.’

‘Innocent!’ exclaimed Marie involuntarily.

‘To be sure he was, my dear. Why, he was as fond of you as could be, only I led him into that scrape so that he would not be able——’

Clotilde got no farther, for even she was startled at the effect of her words upon her sister, who sprang from her seat and caught her by the hands.

‘Clotilde!’ she exclaimed hoarsely, ‘this is all a lie! Tell me it is all a lie, and I will forgive you.’

‘Do as you like, only don’t squeeze diamond rings into my fingers. All true enough: Marcus held his tongue, as I tell you, like a lamb, to save my credit. What fools men are!’

‘Then—then,’ wailed Marie, ‘he was true?’

‘Why, my sentimental sister! You ought to bless me instead of looking like that.’

For a moment, though, in spite of her forced mirth, Clotilde shrank from her sister’s wild gaze, but only to put on an air of bravado as she exclaimed:

‘There, Rie, I made up my mind to serve you out, and I did.’

Marie drew away from her, gazing in her false, handsome face the while, and sank back in the nearest chair, holding her hands pressed against her side as if she were in terrible pain, while her face worked as a convulsive sob escaped from her breast.

‘What does it matter now? You are looking as if—as if—— Rie! Here, take my salts.’

‘Keep back, woman—don’t touch me!’ cried Marie, in a low voice. ‘Sister? No, you must be a demon, and—oh! God help me! God help me!’ she wailed; ‘what have I done?’

Clotilde rushed at her with an imperious ‘Hush!’ but her sister avoided her grasp, and fled to the bell, rang it furiously, and startled Clotilde into silence, as a servant hurried up.

‘Quick! I am ill. Fetch Lord Henry,’ gasped Marie; and as the butler hurried out, she followed him downstairs, leaving her sister too much startled by the effects of her revelation to do more than listen at the half-opened door.

‘What do I care!’ she said at last. ‘She is ill, and she is gone. She will not dare to say a word, and I can live down any nonsense on the part of Rie.’

The front door closed as she uttered these words, after which she turned back into the room, and threw herself upon a couch.

‘I wish someone would come, if it was only stupid little Dick,’ she said pettishly. ‘Poor old Rie! But she did not marry Marcus Glen.’

Clotilde’s white teeth closed with a snap, and she lay perfectly still, gazing at her handsome face in the nearest glass.

CHAPTER VIII.

GERTRUDE TAKES SANCTUARY.

VALENTINE VIDLER and Salome his wife chirped about the gloomy house in Wimpole Street like a pair of exceedingly happy crickets. Vidler used to kiss Mrs. V. and say she was a 'dear little woman,' and Mrs. V. would always, when they were downstairs amongst the shining coppers and tins, call Vidler 'love.' They were quaint to look at, but their blood circulated just as did that of other specimens of humanity; their nerves grew tense or slack in the same way; and in their fashion they thoroughly enjoyed life.

Certainly no children were born unto them, a fact due, perhaps, to the absence of light; but somehow the little couple were very happy without, and so

their life glided on as they placidly thought of other people's troubles, talked of how the Captain took this or that, wondered when Sir Humphrey would come and see him again; if Lady Millet would ever get over the snubbing she had had, for wanting to interfere during a visit, and let in light, which she declared she could not exist without, and Captain Millet had told her she could get plenty out of doors.

Dull as the house seemed, it was never dull to Salome, with her dusting, cleaning, cooking, and cutting-up little squares and diamonds of cotton print for her master's needle, and afterwards lining and quilting the counterpanes, which were in great request for charitable affairs and fancy bazaars.

The kitchen at Wimpole Street was very cosy in its way—a good fire always burned in the glistening grate, a cricket or two chirped in warm corners; there was a very white hearthstone, a very bright steel fender, and a very thick warm hearthrug, composed of cloth shreds, in front of the little round table drawn up pretty close; for absence of light meant apparently absence of heat.

The tea-things were out, it being eight o'clock ; the Captain's dinner over, Renée seated by the panel reading to him in a low voice, and the Vidlers' duties done for the day. Hence, then, they had their tea punctually at eight o'clock, making it their supper as well.

Vidler was busy, with a white napkin spread over his knees, making toast, which Mrs. V. buttered liberally, and then placed round after round upon the plate, which just fitted the steel disc in the fender.

The kettle was sending out its column of steam, the hot toast looked buttery and brown, and a fragrant scent arose from the teapot, the infusion being strong and good, consequent upon the Captain's having one cup directly after his dinner, and the pot being kept afterwards to draw.

The meal over and the tea-things washed up—Salome doing the washing, finishing off with that special rinse round of the tray with hot water and the pouring out of the rinsings at one corner, just as a photographer used to cover his plate with collodion—the table was cleared, aprons folded and put away by Vidler in the dresser drawer, while his wife brushed

up the hearth, and then came the event of the day—that is to say, the work being done, came the play.

It was the Vidlers' sole amusement, and it was entered into with a kind of solemn unction in accordance with the gloom of the place. Some learned people would have been of opinion that a light gymnastic kind of sport would have been that most suited for such a life as the Vidlers led, and would have liked to see hooks in the ceiling, and Valentine and his little wife swinging by ropes and turning head over heels on bars for the bringing into play of unused muscles. They might have introduced, too, that pleasing occupation of turning one's self into a human quintain, with a couple of clubs swung round and round over the head to the great endangerment of the rows of plates and tureens upon the dresser, but they would have been wrong: the stairs gave both an abundance of gymnastic exercise, and their ordinary work brought their other muscles into play. Hence, then, they disported themselves over a pleasant pastime which combined skill, the elements of chance, and mental and arithmetical calculation—the Vidlers' pastime was cribbage.

The cards taken from the box which opened out into a board were tolerably clean, though faded, it being Salome's custom to rub them once a week with bread-crumbs, and upon the couple taking their places, with a vast amount of solemnity, spectacles were mounted, and the game began.

Old-fashioned six-card cribbage was their favourite, because, as Vidler said, he didn't care twopence for a game where there wasn't plenty of pegging ; so the cards were cut. Salome won the deal ; they were cut again, and she began.

It was a sight to see Salome deal the cards. Had they been hundred-pound notes she could not have been more particular ; wetting her thumb, and taking the greatest care she could to deliver only one at a time, while Vidler looked calmly on, then took up his, smiled at them, selected two for the crib, frowned over them, counted how many he should hold, tried another way, seemed satisfied, and then as he threw out, having thoroughly instructed his partner—now his opponent—in all the technicalities and time-honoured sayings of the game, he informed Salome that he had contrived a 'regular bilk.'

‘Have you?’ said Salome, nodding and throwing out her own couple. ‘Cut up.’

Vidler ‘cut up,’ and Salome took the card upon the top, exclaimed ‘Two for his heels,’ scored them, and Vidler frowned, for his ‘bilk’ accorded wonderfully well with the turned-up card. ‘Master didn’t seem to relish that cutlet,’ said Vidler, playing first—‘six.’

‘No,’ said Salome, ‘he has been too much bothered lately—‘fifteen,’ and she scored a second ‘two.’

‘More trouble coming,’ said Vidler — ‘twenty-two.’

‘And nine’s a screw,’ said Salome seriously, taking another couple for thirty-one.

Then the played cards were solemnly turned down and the game went on.

‘Eight,’ said Vidler. ‘How ill Miss Renée looks!’

‘Fourteen,’ said Salome, playing a six. ‘Yes, poor girl! she’s brought her pigs to a bad market.’

‘Got you this time,’ said Vidler, smiling, as he played an ace—‘fifteen’—and scored his two.

‘Twenty,’ said Salome; and so the game went on, the little woman playing with all the serious precision

of an old stager, calling thirty-one 'eleven,' informing Vidler when she was well ahead that it was 'all Leadenhall Street to a China orange,' and proving herself such an adept that the little man was thoroughly beaten.

'Better luck next time,' said Vidler, giving the cards a good shuffle; and then the pair stopped to listen, for faint and low, like a melody from another land, came the sad sweet voice of Renée, singing that wonderful old Irish air, 'Grammachree,' putting an end to the play, for the couple sat and listened, Vidler nodding his head gently, and waving a card to the melancholy cadence till it ended, when the game once more began.

Pop!

'Bless us and save us!' cried Salome, dropping her cribbage-peg as she was in the act of scoring three for a run; 'is it a purse or a coffin?'

Vidler rose, and, taking the tongs, carefully picked up the cinder which had flown from the fire, and was now making an unpleasant savour of burning woollen fabric to arise from the hearthrug. He laid it solemnly

upon the table to cool, and then it was shaken by Salome, but gave forth no answering tinkle.

‘It isn’t a purse,’ she said, holding it to the light.
‘It’s a coffin!’

She handed the little hollow bubble of cindery coal-tar to her husband, and he laid it down, took off and wiped his perfectly clean spectacles, and replaced them before carefully examining the portent by the light.

‘It’s a coffin for somebody,’ he said solemnly; and then, as he carefully cremated the cinder in the most glowing portion of the fire, the couple sighed, resumed their places, and sat listening as the voice of Renée singing to Captain Millet once more came down to where they sat.

It was ‘Ye banks and braes’ this time, and when the pathetic old air was ended Salome sighed.

‘Ah, poor dear, yes—“My false lu-huv has plu-ucked the ro-az, and le-heft the tho—horn be—hi—hind with me,”’ said and sang Salome, in a little piping plaintive voice. ‘I hope it isn’t for her!’

‘It may mean only trouble,’ said Vidler, with his head on one side. ‘I have known coffins pop out of the fire and no one die.’

‘Oh dear no,’ said Salome. ‘There’s not a minute passes but someone dies.’

‘No,’ said Vidler slowly, as if the great problem propounded required much consideration ; ‘but so long as it isn’t anyone here, why, it don’t matter.’

‘Quite so much,’ said Salome correctively. ‘Let me see ; it was three for a run. I shall beat you this time. You want fourteen.’

‘Yes,’ said Vidler, chuckling ; ‘but it’s my first show. You want sixteen.’

‘Yes,’ said Salome, pegging one for a ‘go,’ ‘but I’ve got hand and crib. Now then.’

‘Sixteen,’ said Vidler triumphantly, as he threw down his cards and stuck a peg in the winning hole.

‘Think of that now,’ said Salome, as she gathered up the cards for what she called a good shuffle, which was performed by dividing the pack in two equal portions and holding them as if about to build a card house, allowing them to fall alternately one over the other. Then they were knocked together hard and square, and handed to Vidler, who gave them what he termed ‘a Canterbury poke,’ which consisted in rapidly thrusting his forefinger right to the centre of

the pack and driving out a large portion of the cards, which were afterwards placed upon the top. Then the pack was cut once more, and game after game followed till suddenly there was a loud ring at the bell.

‘What was that?’ cried Salome.

‘The coffin,’ said Vidler solemnly.

‘Bless us and save us, man, don’t look like that!’ cried Salome; ‘it turns me cold all down my back;’ and then, with a shiver, and very wide-open eyes, she followed her little lord up to the front door, where Huish’s maid was waiting with a note and a cab to take Renée away.

This caused a little flutter upstairs, and a greater one down, where Jane, with a few additions of her own, related the arrest of her master.

‘It was trouble, then, and not death,’ said Vidler sagely to his wife, who then had to answer the bell, and assist Renée, who, after a short conference with Captain Millet, dressed and hurried off to join her sister.

‘Good-bye, my dear,’ said the Captain, sighing. ‘I shall not go to bed. You may return.’

Renée was seen into the cab, and the Vidlers, upon

receiving an intimation from their master, made up the kitchen fire and sat before it, as if cooking, to see if Mrs. Morrison came back, which she did in about an hour, on finding from the cook that Huish had been and taken her sister away, the same personage informing her that Sir Humphrey and Mr. Millet had not returned.

Renée hesitated for a time as to whether she should stay or go to Grosvenor Square to make inquiries; but this last she was averse to doing; and, with a full conviction upon her that Huish and Gertrude would be sure to call at Wimpole Street, even if she had not already missed them, she hurried back.

‘They may come yet,’ said Captain Millet quietly. ‘We will wait and see.’

Fresh candles were brought, and tea was made, of which no one partook, and then the occupants of the gloomy house waited hour after hour in full faith of some news coming during the night, with the consequence that everyone was on the alert when the bell rang about four o’clock.

Vidler hastened up to open the door, and uttered a cry of dismay which brought down Renée, for Ger-

trude Huish fell forward fainting into his arms, to lie where she was carried hour after hour, now awakening to a wild hysterical fit, now sinking back into semi-unconsciousness, and always unable to respond to the eager queries, till at last she started up wildly, and on recognising her sister, flung her arms round her neck, exclaiming :

‘Oh, Ren, Ren ! is there no more happiness on earth ? My poor heart’s broken : I shall die !’

CHAPTER IX.

LADY HENRY GROWS CALM.

‘CAN you not take me into your confidence, Marie?’ said Lord Henry, on meeting his wife at the breakfast-table the morning after her sister’s revelation.

She looked at him wildly for a few moments, her large eyes encircled with dark rings, and the traces of terrible emotion in her blanched face.

She had been in a state of mental agony the night through, refusing to retire, and passing much of the time in pacing up and down the room. But towards morning she had grown calmer. Her mental pain was somewhat dulled, and as she perceived the terrible agitation into which she had plunged her husband, she began to feel a kind of remorse and pity for him as well as for herself.

At first she had been half maddened, for she did not for a moment doubt Clotilde's words. Everything was only too suggestive, and as she felt that she had hastily condemned Marcus Glen, who had been all that was chivalrous and true, there were moments when she told herself that she could not live.

It was so horrible. She had loved Marcus Glen with all the strong passion of her nature. For his sake she would have borne poverty and privation, and been truly happy, believing thoroughly in his love; but when, in place of finding him the true, honest gentleman she had trusted, she believed that he was base, her love had turned to hatred, and she had fled, telling herself that she had nothing to hope for now, and that if she could make others happy she need expect no more.

Awakening at last, after a night of bitter suffering, to the anguish of her husband, she had made a brave effort over self, and turned to him as her refuge from the suffering to which she was reduced.

She clung to him, praying for help and strength to cast out the image of Marcus Glen from her heart

and at last she felt that she had the strength, and told herself that she would consider the past as dead.

But even as she lay there with her husband's hands pressed to her forehead, the thought would come that she ought to tell Marcus Glen that she knew the truth.

A paroxysm of agony followed this thought. What avail would it be now? She felt that he would curse her for her want of faith in him, and, think of it all as she would, she could only come to the conclusion that, in her haste and want of trust in him she loved, she had blasted her future, and must bear it to the end.

Daybreak at last; and with the sun came thoughts of her position, and the necessity for making some effort—an effort which she was now too weak to essay. But at last she rose, and as the time wore on begged Lord Henry to leave her, meeting him again a couple of hours later at breakfast, apparently calm, but with a tempest raging in her breast.

He uttered no word of reproach, but was tenderness itself, and the tears stole more than once down his furrowed cheeks; and when at last he appealed to her as her husband, she broke down, threw herself sobbing upon his breast, and begged him to spare her.

‘I will not say another word,’ he replied gently. ‘My wish is to make you happy in my poor way, and I only pressed you for your confidence, so that I might help you to be more at rest.’

‘I don’t like to have secrets from you,’ she whispered ; ‘dear husband !’

He held her more tightly to his breast as she called him this, and she uttered a low sigh of relief, for it was as though he told her of his trust. It gave her strength to proceed, and she went on :

‘My sister quarrelled with me, and said such bitter things that I could not bear them. She brought up the scene upon that terrible night of which you were a witness.’

‘Let it be buried with the past,’ said Lord Henry gravely. ‘It should never have been revived, and I see now but too plainly that I was to blame in accepting the invitation.’

‘Never accept one again ; I could not bear it. Clotilde’s path and mine must be separate through life. I could not meet her now.’

‘Are you not too hard upon your sister?’

‘Hard?’ cried Marie. ‘Oh no ! You do not know

all,' she was about to say, but she refrained, and went on : 'Clotilde has altered since her marriage. I think we should be happier apart. Help me in this, dear husband. It would be better so.'

He raised her face, and gazed tenderly into her wild eyes, as he said :

'Your happiness is my care, Marie, my child. I promised to try and make your home one of rest and peace. Ask me what you will, and it shall be done.'

'Then you will keep our lives separate from my sister's,' she cried eagerly.

'If you asked me my wishes on the subject,' he said quietly, and he smiled as he spoke, 'I should gladly cut myself off from all connection with Mr. Elbraham and his wife. But we have our social duties to perform, Marie, even if they are against our taste.'

'Duties !' cried Marie excitedly ; 'it is my duty to avoid my sister, yours to keep us apart. Believe me, this is for the best.'

'I gladly follow out your wishes, my child,' said Lord Henry, 'and I will ask you no more questions if you will try to let this cloud go by.'

‘Yes, yes,’ she cried eagerly, ‘it is gone ;’ and she flung her arms round his neck, and sobbed hysterically upon his breast.

‘There,’ she cried with a piteous smile, for the face of Marcus Glen seemed to haunt her still. ‘Now I am quite calm, and I have a petition to make.’

‘What is it?’ he said with a sigh of relief, and the lines in his face grew less deep.

‘I want you to let me ask my cousin Ruth to come and stay with me—to be like a companion to me. Don’t think,’ she hastened to add, ‘that I am dull and want companions, but I have a double object to perform.’

‘Yes?’ he said inquiringly.

‘I wish—I want to withdraw her from Clotilde’s influence.’

‘A good and worthy desire, my child,’ he said, bowing his approval. ‘I like Ruth very, very much. She is sweet, and natural, and true.’

‘She is,’ cried Marie eagerly.

‘And your other object?’

‘I wish to watch over her, and to try and influence her future. She would be happier with me, and if

she is to marry I should like hers to be a worthy choice.'

'Of course, yes, you are quite right; and what do you say—shall we fetch her here?'

'Yes,' cried Marie eagerly.

'When? To-day?'

'Yes — no,' replied Marie. 'I am not strong enough; I am not calm enough to-day. I will write and ask her to be ready to-morrow, and, if you will do it, let us drive down and fetch her.'

Lord Henry Moorpark sighed with relief and pleasure, and soon after, fighting bravely to crush down her own agony of heart, Marie wrote a note to ask her aunts' permission for Ruth to come, and another to request her to be ready—and all the time with an intensity of sorrow striving with her wild and passionate love. She seemed to see in Ruth one who was to save her from the commission of a crime from which she shrank in horror. Ruth would be her protector. Ruth should be always with her, and she would learn from her sweet, innocent young heart how to school her own.

The visit of Ruth to her cousin in St. James's Square commenced during a temporary absence of Mr. Paul Montaigne from his apartments at Teddington.

Business had taken him to London, where he stayed a week, at the end of which time he walked through the chestnut avenue quietly, as of old, paused by the Diana pool to cast a few crumbs to the fishes, and then continued his walk, with his hands behind him, to the Palace, where he was met by Joseph, at whom he smiled benignantly, and was shown in to where the honourable sisters were seated at their embroidery. The hands of the fair Isabella were a little more tremulous than was their wont, consequent upon an encounter during a walk, when she and her sister had met Glen.

The visitor was received most warmly, and heard glowing accounts of the happiness and brilliant establishments of the dear children.

'Yes,' he said blandly, 'they must be happy. I had some thought of calling upon them when in town, but I bethought me that they must be fully occupied with their friends and the management of their homes,

and that my visit, at present, might seem out of place.'

'I think it would have been a duty properly fulfilled—what do you say, sister?' exclaimed the Honourable Philippa.

'I think it would have been a duty and a kindness,' said the Honourable Isabella, making a couple of false stitches before she found out her mistake.

'I have been remiss,' said Montaigne, with a bland smile, as he bent his head. 'How day by day one awakens more and more to the fact that human nature is far from perfect!'

'Ah, indeed!' said the Honourable Philippa.

'Yes, indeed!' said the Honourable Isabella, with a lively recollection of her thoughts regarding Marcus Glen.

'I must try and remedy my failing, ladies, at my next visit to town. But how is the last lamb in this peaceful fold—Ruth?'

He uttered this inquiry with his eyes half closed, and a calm, sweet smile played the while about his lips till he heard the Honourable Philippa's reply:

'Oh, she is in town! Lord and Lady Henry came

down in the barouche the day before yesterday, and fetched her up to stay with them for some time.'

The warm, pleasant look in Paul Montaigne's face changed to one of a grim cold gray; the smile disappeared, his lips tightened, and he seemed for the moment to have grown old and careworn. Even his voice changed, and sounded hard and harsh as he said quickly:

'Indeed? I did not know.'

'Marie thought it would be a pleasant change for her, and companionable as well, and dear Lady Little-town, who was calling at the time, said it was the best thing we could do. So she is gone.'

'It would be a most pleasant change.'

'And, of course, you know, dear Mr. Montaigne, Ruth is no longer a child, and—er—you understand.'

'Yes, of course,' said Montaigne; who, however, recalled to mind that Ruth was quite a child until her cousins were married.

At that idea of seeing company and the following suggestion of marriage the strange pallor became more evident in Montaigne's countenance, and in

spite of his forced smile and self-control, he kept passing his dry tongue over his parched lips, and unconsciously drew in his breath as if he were suffering from thirst.

He grew worse as the conversation continued to take the ugly turn, to him, of marriage. For, said the Honourable Philippa :

‘Lady Littletown informs us that a marriage is on the *tapis* between Mr. Arthur Litton, a friend of Mr. Elbraham, and our dear Lady Anna Maria Morton.’

‘I congratulate Lady Anna Maria, I am sure,’ said Montaigne huskily; and as he glanced at the Honourable Isabella that lady trembled more than usual, and believed that Montaigne was reading her heart, and mentally asking her whether she would ever be married to Marcus Glen.

Mr. Montaigne refused to stay to lunch. He had so many little things to attend to consequent upon the business that had called him to London; in fact, even now he was only down for a few hours, having come to seek some papers. These he had found, and he was going back to town at once. Business was very tiresome, he said.

The honourable sisters agreed that it was, and Mr. Montaigne took his leave with reverent, affectionate grace, and passed out into the gardens, along whose broad gravel paths he walked slowly in his customary way—bland, sweet, and introspective with his half-closed eyes. But though he did not increase his pace in obedience to his rapidly-beating pulse, a close observer would have noticed that he did not stop to feed the fishes on his way back to Teddington, while his landlady was surprised at the hurried way in which he again took his departure.

The change from Hampton Court to St. James's was delightful to Ruth, who only felt one drawback to the pleasure of her visit—that she could not expect to see Marcus Glen and Richard Millet during her walks.

‘I wonder whether she thinks him so guilty as she did,’ mused Ruth; and these musings were continued one evening after dinner, when she was seated at work in Lord Henry's drawing-room, with Marie, who was very pale, close at hand; Lord Henry being, according to custom, seated over his wine—a pleasant,

old-fashioned fiction, wherein a decanter of excellent old port was placed before him every evening, of which he drank one glass only, and then went to sleep till the butler announced tea.

Just in the midst of her thoughts respecting Marcus Glen, and as if some electric mental chord of sympathy existed between them, Marie said, in a quiet, rather forced voice :

‘Have you seen Captain Glen lately, Ruthy?’

It cost Marie a tremendous effort to say those words calmly. And then that terrible pang of jealousy shot through her breast once more as she saw the crimson blood flush into Ruth’s cheeks and rise above her brows.

Poor Ruth faltered, and looked as guilty as if she had been discovered in some offence, as she replied :

‘Yes, only a few days ago. He spoke to us in the Gardens. I was walking with my aunts.’

Marie felt relieved. He could not have said much to Ruth if her aunts were by, and she sighed with content, but only to take herself angrily to task once more, and strive to spur herself onward to her duty.

It was in this disposition, then, that she said quietly :

‘I thought it right to say to you, Ruthy, that I think you were correct about—about Captain Glen.’

‘That he was not guilty, as you imagined?’ cried Ruth eagerly.

Marie bowed her head, and she felt a strange constriction of the heart on seeing the bright animation in Ruth’s countenance—a suggestion of the pain that she was in future to feel ; but she mastered her emotion, and Ruth went on :

‘I am so glad, you cannot think!’ she said.

‘Why?’ said Marie, in a cold, hard voice, which made Ruth colour highly ; but she spoke out.

‘Because it seemed so cruel to one who always was kind and chivalrous and——’

She stopped short with a curiously puzzled look gathering upon her brow, for it now occurred to her that Marie must be angry with herself for casting off Marcus Glen, but she could not read it in her eyes, while the puzzled look deepened as Marie said quietly :

‘I am very glad, Ruthy—very glad to feel that I

was not mistaken in him, and that he is indeed the true gentleman we believed.'

Ruth took a stool and placed it at Marie's feet, seating herself there and clinging to her hand, while her cousin softly stroked her hair, vowing to herself the while that if Ruth cared for Marcus Glen, no jealous pang should hinder her from aiding in bringing them together, and no act of hers should be such as would be traitorous to Lord Henry, her confiding husband.

'Why do you look at me so strangely, Ruthy?' said Marie at last.

'I was thinking.'

'Thinking what?'

'Don't ask me, Marie,' said Ruth in a troubled tone.

'Why not? Shall I tell you? You were thinking that I repent of having married Lord Henry, now that I know I was deceived. Tell me!' she cried, lifting up Ruth's burning face, and gazing at her searchingly: 'you were thinking that, were you not?'

'Yes,' faltered Ruth, 'I was.'

'Then you were wrong, Ruthy,' said Marie gravely.

‘Perhaps I did feel something like compunction when I found this out, but that is all past now, and I am married to one of the best and kindest of men.’

‘And you are happy, Marie?’

There was a pause, for it cost Marie a bitter struggle to utter that one word with a smile, but she spoke it bravely at last, and there was a sense of relief after it was said :

‘Quite.’ Then, after another pause : ‘Lord Henry is all that is tender and good to me ; and now, Ruthy, about yourself?’

‘Oh, I am only too glad to come and see you sometimes!’

‘Yes ; but about this little heart. Ruthy, will you confide in me?’

Marie drew the trembling girl closer to her side, and tried to gaze in her face, but it was averted.

‘Yes,’ she whispered ; ‘of course I will.’

‘Then tell me this—frankly : you love Marcus Glen?’

The pained aspect came back into Marie’s face, and her brow was rugged, as she waited for Ruth’s answer.

‘I don’t know,’ said Ruth at last.

‘You don’t know? Is this your confidence?’

‘Oh, don’t speak angrily to me!’ cried Ruth passionately. ‘I will keep nothing from you, Marie. Indeed, indeed I do not know, only that I have prayed, so hard, so very hard, that I might not love him.’

‘Prayed that you might not love him?’ said Marie, smiling.

‘Yes; for I felt that it would be so treacherous, and that it would cause pain to all—to you—to me. Oh, why do you ask me this?’

‘Hush! you are growing agitated, and I want to talk to you quietly, and for your good. Suppose it had ceased to be treacherous to think of Captain Glen—suppose he could be brought to love you, and were to ask you to be his wife: what would you say then?’

A servant entered and announced Mr. Paul Montaigne; and, blandly calm and smiling, that gentleman entered the room.

It was a surprise for both, and Ruth’s heart began to beat strangely fast as, in his customary paternal way, Montaigne greeted each in turn. She recalled

that evening when their visitor had talked with her in the drawing-room, but her dread had increased each time they met, and it was all she could do to keep from shrinking from him and showing her aversion.

But little was said more than that Montaigne told them he was in town on business, and that he had thought he would call, before Lord Henry joined them, greeting Montaigne very warmly, and ending, to Ruth's horror, by asking him to dine with them next day, and to spend an hour with them whenever he could spare the time.

The rest of that particular evening was passed in quite a political discussion between Lord Henry and his guest, Montaigne taking so little notice of Ruth that her heart grew more at rest; but there was a something in his look as he said good-night, something in the pressure of his hand, that made her think this man loved her, and as she felt for the moment that it might be possible for him to ask her aunts to give her to him as his wife, the poor girl turned cold, and gladly went off shivering to her sleep-forsaken bed.

Ruth had not been with her long when Marie received the old-fashioned communication of wedding

cards; the notice in the paper of the marriage of Arthur Litton, Esq., of Duke Street, St. James's, to Lady Anna Maria Morton, of the private apartments, Hampton Court Palace, having escaped her eye.

The young couple took a house in Bryanston Square, which Lady Littleton said was charmingly furnished; visits followed, at one of which an unexpected encounter took place.

Lady Anna Maria was at home, the servant said in answer to the queries, and Marie and Ruth descended from the carriage, and were shown up to the drawing-room, where, seated with his back to the light, talking to the bride, was Glen, in company with Dick Millet.

Marie felt as if all the blood in her body had rushed to her head, and the room seemed to swim round, but she mastered her emotion, and after receiving Lady Anna Maria's greeting, she turned with quiet self-possession to where Glen stood, cold and stern, waiting to take leave, and calmly offered him her hand.

'I am glad to see you again, Captain Glen,' she said gravely; and Marcus started with astonishment,

eagerly catching the extended hand, and hardly able to stammer out some words of greeting.

Then a bitter look crossed his face, and he turned from Marie coldly, and began, with a vivid recollection of the past, to talk to Ruth, while Marie made Dick colour with pleasure as she shook hands, and then sat and chatted with him with all the warmth of an old friend.

But the ice was broken, and that one meeting led to others, Lady Anna Maria, with all the eagerness of a young bride, lending herself to what was evidently in her eyes the making up of a match between Ruth, who was so charming and fresh and sweet, and Captain Glen.

The visits to Bryanston Square were not frequent, but, to her horror, Ruth noted that Glen was always there as if he expected to meet Marie; and though he was kindness itself and full of attention, his quiet deference and low-spoken words were for Marie alone.

Mr. Arthur Litton was very rarely there, so that Lady Anna Maria was their sole entertainer, and this little lady had, after so many years of maidenhood, developed in her married life quite a girlish

skittishness which resulted in a very silly flirtation with little Dick, who was most constant in his attentions, and seemed to ignore her ladyship's excessively thin figure.

'I believe, Dick, you'd flirt with a mop if it was stuck in a petticoat,' said Glen to him one day on their way to Bryanston Square. 'What's it all for—practice?'

'I don't ask you why you flirt with married ladies,' said Dick sharply.

Glen started, and looked grave. And at that time a little friendly counsel might have turned him aside, for he thought a good deal of quiet, grave Lord Henry. But he frowned, and said angrily, 'He is no friend of mine. He came between us. Why should I study him?'

He closed his eyes then fast to the risk and danger, giving himself up to his revived passion, and went on gliding slowly down the slope towards the precipice that threatened both.

On the other side, Ruth was passing through a strange course of education. At first, in her innocence, she could hardly believe it possible, but more and more the fact dawned upon her that a kind of self-

deception was going on with Marie, who apparently believed that she was furthering Ruth's happiness, while she was yielding to the delight of being once more in company with Glen, listening to his voice, living a delicious, dreamy existence, of whose danger she seemed to be unaware.

CHAPTER X.

A DANGEROUS ENEMY.

MUCH as Ruth was in Marie's confidence, and sisterly as their intercourse had become, there were points now upon which each feared to touch.

Of late Glen's name had ceased to be mentioned, and Ruth's feelings towards Marie were a strange intermingling of love, jealousy, and fear.

Ruth was alone one day in the drawing-room, having stayed at home on account of a slight headache, while Marie had gone to make a few calls after setting down Lord Henry at his club.

Ruth had taken up a book, but though she went through page after page, she had not the slightest recollection of what she had been reading, her thoughts having wandered away to Marcus Glen and Marie.

‘I ought to have gone with her,’ she thought ; and then she began to tremble as she felt a kind of dread overcoming her.

‘It is terrible,’ she thought ; ‘I cannot bear it. He does not care for me, and I cannot save him ; but,’ she cried, setting her teeth, ‘I will not leave her again, and I will speak to her at once.’

She hesitated for a moment, as if in alarm at the determination she had made, and then moved towards the door.

‘I will go on there at once ; she may be there. If she is not, Marcus Glen will be, and I will appeal to him, for I cannot bear this agony.’

It was a good resolve, one which she would have carried out ; but just then she recoiled, and her heart began to beat painfully, while the blood forsook her cheeks.

Mr. Montaigne had softly closed the door behind him, and was advancing towards her, with a smile upon his lip, and a peculiar look in his eyes, which made her tremble.

‘What !’ he said, ‘alone ? This is an unexpected pleasure.’

‘He knew I was alone,’ thought Ruth, ‘and that is why he has come.’

He advanced towards her, and in spite of her determination to be firm, she took a step or two backwards before she held out her hand, and said with tolerable firmness :

‘Lady Henry has gone out in the carriage.’

‘And will not be back just yet,’ he said with a smile. ‘Ah, well, it does not matter.’

He had taken her hand and pressed it firmly, retaining it in his, and before Ruth could realize it he had drawn her to him, and pressed his lips to hers.

‘Mr. Montaigne!’ she cried, struggling to free herself. ‘This is an insult!’

‘What! from me?’ he whispered, his face flushing, and his arms clasping her more tightly. ‘Why, what nonsense, Ruth! You know how I have loved you from the time you were a child, and have always meant that you should some day be my little wife.’

‘Oh no! It is impossible! Mr. Montaigne, are you mad?’

She cast a despairing glance at the bell, but it was

beyond her reach, and he smiled as he kissed her passionately again and again.

‘Why are you left alone?’ he said in a hoarse whisper; ‘because fate has arranged it expressly for us. See how I have patiently waited for an opportunity, ever since that night when we were surprised in each other’s arms by that wretched servant. Why, Ruth, Ruth, my little one, what is the use of this struggling? It is absurd. You are a woman now—the woman I have always loved. It is our secret, darling, and——’

‘Help! help!’ cried Ruth loudly as the door opened and Marie walked in, Mr. Paul Montaigne, carried away by his passion, having failed to hear the carriage stop, quite a couple of hours sooner than he had expected.

‘What is the meaning of this?’ cried Marie fiercely, as Ruth ran to her arms, panting and sobbing with shame.

‘Marie—why did you leave me? He—insulted—this man——’

‘Is a villain who hides his true nature beneath a mask,’ cried Marie indignantly. ‘I always doubted

him. How comes he to be alone here with you ? Leave the house, sir ! Lord Henry shall be made acquainted with the conduct of his guest.'

Marie placed Ruth in a chair, and was crossing towards the bell, when Montaigne said quietly :

' Ah, yes ; poor Lord Henry ! He does not know us all by heart.'

Marie stopped as if she had been stung, and faced round, darting an indignant glance at Montaigne, who, in place of leaving the room, coolly walked to one of the mirrors, and readjusted his white tie.

Marie recovered herself, and had her hand upon the bell, when Montaigne said quietly :

' Don't be foolish, my dear ; exposures are such awkward things.'

' For you, sir,' cried Marie. ' Then leave the house, and never enter it again. But for the fact of your being so old a friend, I would have you turned out.'

' Words, words, words, my dear Marie,' he said, taking a chair and crossing his legs. ' Let me see. It is Hamlet says that, I think. Now look here, my dear child—but sit c'own, I want to talk to you.'

‘Will you leave this room, sir?’ cried Marie angrily.

‘No, my child, I shall not,’ he said, smiling. ‘You say you are ready to expose me for this playful little interview which you interrupted between Ruth here and myself—Ruth, the lady who is to be my wife.’

‘Your wife!’ cried Marie indignantly.

‘Yes : my wife ; and don’t raise your voice like that, my dear child. By the way, you are back soon. Was not our dear Marcus at Bryanston Square?’

‘Marcus? Captain Glen?’ cried Marie, whose lips turned white.

‘There, my dear little girl. You are not little now, but you seem little to me. You forget, in this wondrous fit of virtuous anger, that I have stood for so many years towards you in the light of a father. In my way I have helped you to position and a rich husband, and when I found that, womanlike—fashionable womanlike, I should say—your ladyship was beginning to show taste for pleasure, and even taking to your handsome self a lover, I did not interfere. While because I, in due course, and after a long and patient courtship, take the girl I love in my arms,

you talk of turning me out, call me scoundrel and villain, and threaten me with Lord Henry's displeasure.'

'It is disgraceful, sir,' said Marie; 'you are old enough to be her father.'

'Humph! Yes. Perhaps so, but nothing like so much older as Lord Henry is than you. Now look here, my dear Marie, I am obliged to speak plainly. I don't ask for a truce; but I demand your help and countenance. I mean to marry Ruth.'

Marie stood pointing to the door, but Montaigne did not stir.

'Pshaw!' he exclaimed—'a stage trick. Are you aware of what it means to make me your enemy, my dear child? You are angry and excited now. You did not quite realize my words. Do you think I am blind about Captain Glen? As to dropping the mask, well, there, it is down. I am a man even as you are a woman, and why should I not love?'

Marie's arm dropped to her side, and she stood gazing at him with her cheeks and lips now ashy of hue.

'There,' he continued, laughing, 'the storm is over,

and we understand each other. I will go now, and mind this, dear Marie, I will religiously keep your ladyship's secrets so long as you keep mine.'

He rose, and, taking her hand, mockingly kissed it. Then, crossing to Ruth, he would have caught her in his arms, but she started from him, and stood at bay on the other side of a table.

'You foolish child!' he said, laughing; 'you must be a little wiser when I come again.'

As the door closed upon him Marie stood with her eyes closed, listening, and then with a cry of despair she threw herself into her cousin's arms.

'Oh, Ruth, Ruth, Ruth, what have I done! what have I done! I swear to you I am innocent, indeed—indeed.'

'I believe it, I know it,' cried Ruth, holding her to her heart; 'but oh, Marie, you must never see him again! Pray, pray keep away.'

'Yes, yes,' she cried; 'I will. I am innocent, I am indeed. But, oh, it is horrible! I will stay away. I will see him no more. But you—that man—he has us in his power.'

'I beg your pardon,' said a soft voice; 'I think I

must have left my gloves in here. Yes, there they are!’ and Paul Montaigne quietly crossed the room, took a pair of gloves from a chair, and then smiled and went softly out.

The cousins gazed in each other’s eyes, motionless, till they heard the closing of the front door.

‘Oh, Marie,’ whispered Ruth, in an awe-stricken way, ‘he must have heard every word you said!’

And Marie echoed hoarsely, ‘Every word!’

Mr. Montaigne allowed a couple of days to elapse before he called again in St. James’s, and then, serious man as he was, he swore, for the shutters were closed : the family was out of town.

It was no unusual time for anyone to go, for, as he stood there hesitating on the step, a slatternly-looking girl was making the streets ring with her minor-pitched cry of ‘Sixteen branches a penny — new lavender ; sixteen branches a penny.’ It was well on in August, and fashionable London was taking wing.

‘Clever woman!’ thought Montaigne : ‘this² is her move ; but I can mate her when I please.’

He rang, and a woman-servant answered the bell.

‘His lordship is out of town,’ the woman said.

‘ At his country seat ? ’ said Montaigne at haphazard.

‘ Oh dear no, sir ! his lordship has taken my lady and Miss Allerton on the Continong, and they are not coming back for some time. Mr. Harvey, his lordship’s agent, will send on all letters.’

‘ Thank you. I am very much obliged,’ said Montaigne with his blindest smile ; and he raised his hat and went away smiling, cursing Marie in his heart.

‘ “ All comes to the man who waits,” ’ he thought.

CHAPTER XI.

RUTH'S WORK UNDONE.

THE Continental trip extended to months, after which there were a few visits, so that it was well into the next season before they were back at the house in St. James's, and after their return Marie devoted herself to Ruth, hoping that Montaigne would not show himself again, though they both trembled at the thought of his coming.

Still, he did not show himself, and matters went on so happily and well that Ruth began to hope that Marie's love for Glen was dead, when, in an evil hour, and, as Marie said, to fulfil a social duty, they called upon Lady Anna Maria Morton, meeting Lady Little-town there ; when that lady insisted upon their dining with her at her town house, and it was next to impossible to refuse.

Lady Littletown was a match-maker at heart, and she always looked upon her conservatory, with its brilliant flowers, as her greatest aid in such matters. Hence it was that her ladyship took care to have a conservatory wherever she lived.

She had taken a handsome house in South Kensington for a short season, one that was admirably furnished in this respect, though far from being equal to Mr. Elbraham's glass palace. Still, it was enough.

Lord Henry frowned slightly on finding that Captain Glen was among the guests, and deputed by Lady Littletown to take Marie in to dinner; but his brow cleared directly, and he smiled at his wife as she went by him and gave him an appealing look that seemed to say, 'Don't blame me.'

Hardly had they passed on to the staircase before Glen said in a quick, agitated voice: 'I thought I was never to see you again. I must have a few words with you before you go.'

Five minutes before, Marie had told herself that she was brave and strong, and that the past fancy was dead; but on hearing these words her hand trembled, her heart beat fast, and she knew that she was as

weak as ever, and that she could only falter : ' It is impossible !'

' It is not impossible !' he said angrily. ' I must—I will see you.'

They entered the dining-room, and for the next two hours everything seemed to Marie like a dream. Lord Henry was at the bottom of the table, taking his old place of host, and the flower-filled vases completely shaded his wife from sight : still, Ruth was exactly opposite, apparently listening to the conversation of Glen ; but Marie knew that she was watching them narrowly.

She went upstairs in a dream, just as she had come down, and answered questions, talked and entered into the various themes of conversation as if she were quite collected ; but all the time there had been a restless throbbing of her pulses, and she trembled, and felt that she would have given the world to be away !

At last !

Marie heard the dining-room door open, and the sound of ascending voices. Lord Henry would be there directly, and she would ask him to take her back.

That was Marcus Glen's voice speaking loudly, and every fibre of her body seemed to thrill as she listened to its tones.

Marie's back was to the door as he entered, and she could not see him ; but she seemed to feel his approach, and all was a dream once more, as he seated himself on the ottoman by her, and began to talk about some current topic.

She answered him, took the opposite side, talking freely and well, and Lord Henry chided himself for his uneasy feeling, and felt that he ought to be proud of such a wife. She was devoted to him, and he trusted her with all his heart.

The conversation was very animated for the time that Glen stood by her ; but all the while Marie's pulses kept up that quick, feverish throb, and there was the hidden sense of danger still within her heart.

May had come round again, the Academy pictures were once more drawing their crowds, and directly after an early breakfast one morning Marie and Ruth walked up into Piccadilly to spend a couple of hours while the rooms were empty and cool.

How it happened Marie afterwards hardly realized, but she had become separated from her cousin, who had wandered on into the next room, leaving her gazing listlessly about, when suddenly her heart seemed to stand still, for close beside her there was a low sigh, and she felt more than saw that Glen was at her elbow.

Mastering her emotion, she turned quickly to reproach him for following her there, when she saw that he had his back to her, and was gazing intently at a portrait. She did not speak. It was a kind of gasp or catching of the breath ; but he heard it, and turned sharply round to face her.

‘ Marie ! ’ he exclaimed.

‘ Hush ! Don’t speak to me, for God’s sake ! ’

She said no more, but reeled, and would have fallen had he not caught her arm, and led her through the next opening and downstairs to the refreshment-room, quite empty at that early hour, the waiters not being ready for visitors.

There were a couple of the attendants at hand, ready to bring water and ice, and at the end of a few minutes Marie gazed wildly about her—starting

violently, though, as she heard the deep voice at her side.

‘That will do,’ he said quietly. ‘A few minutes’ rest and she will be quite recovered.’ Then they were alone, with Glen whispering to her eagerly, and she listening with her eyes half closed and a strange dazed look in her pallid face.

‘No, no!’ she said at last feebly.

‘You shall,’ he cried, and his strong will prevailed over her more and more. ‘You must leave him, Marie. I do not ask it: I know you love me. You always have loved me. Come to me, my darling, or I must die.’

‘Die!’ she moaned. ‘No, no; not you. O God, forgive me! Would that I were dead!’

‘Dead, when there is a life of happiness before us?’ he whispered. ‘Marie dearest, at last! You understand?’ he said, after whispering for some time.

‘Yes, yes,’ she said slowly; and he spoke again very quickly, but in low, distinct tones.

‘Yes,’ she repeated heavily, ‘I understand.’

‘Marie!’

‘Lady Henry was taken suddenly ill in one of the

rooms, Miss Allerton,' said Glen hurriedly. 'Fortunately I was there.'

'Ill,' said Ruth slowly, as she ran to Marie's side. 'Fortunately you were there. Captain Glen, I will see to my cousin now. Will you have the goodness to go?'

He raised his hat and slowly walked away.

'Marie, Marie!' cried Ruth piteously. 'How could you deceive me so?'

'No, no!' cried Marie excitedly. 'I did not know he was here. It was an unexpected meeting. Take me——'

She was about to say 'home,' but she could not utter the word, and as they walked back Ruth thought of this, and a hand seemed to compress her heart as she said to herself:

'The work of months undone!'

CHAPTER XII.

JOHN HUISH GETS BACK PART OF HIS BRAINS.

MORE than once during the severe attack of brain-fever from which John Huish lay prostrate at Highgate, Dr. Stonor compressed his lips and asked himself whether he would save his young friend's life. At such times, as he sat by the bedside and gazed in his patient's face, the lineaments brought back the scene by the pit and his father's agony, as Captain Millet lay apparently dying.

‘How time has gone!’ the doctor would mutter, ‘and how like he looks to his father now!’

But a change for the better came at last, and after a long and weary convalescence he was once more about, month after month gliding by, and the brain refusing to accompany the body on its way to health.

He was very quiet and gentle, but he seemed to have no recollection of what had gone by, neither did he evince any desire, but passed his time mostly in the doctor's study, where an unrolled mummy had apparently so great an attraction for him that he would sit near and watch it hour after hour when no one was by.

‘Must get him better first,’ the doctor would say. ‘I can’t run the risk of bringing on a relapse.’

So John Huish remained in utter ignorance of the fact that his young wife had been confined to her bed at the gloomy house in Wimpole Street, so prostrated by all she had had to pass through, that the doctors called in advised total rest and quiet, combined with careful nursing. Nothing calculated to excite her was to reach her ears. Hence, when in his turn Dr. Stonor called, his lips were sealed respecting John Huish's state; and poor Gertrude never mentioned his name.

After leaving Renée by her sister's side, the doctor had a long chat with his old friend, whose white hand trembled as he thrust it forth to be taken by the visitor.

‘How is she?’ said the latter. ‘Ah, poor girl, she is very ill!’

‘But she will get better? Oh, Stonor, don’t flatter me : tell me the truth!’

‘Tell you the truth?—of course I shall! Well, she’ll be better when she gets back to her husband.’

‘And how is John Huish?’ and the white hand trembled inside the panel, like some leaf agitated by the wind.

‘He is bad—very bad,’ said the doctor. ‘I’ve had a hard fight with him, for his brain has had some serious shock. Poor fellow! he has been a little queer in the head for some time past, and consulted me at intervals, but I could make nothing of it. It’s a very obscure case, and I would not—I could not believe that there was anything more than fancy in his symptoms. But he was right, and it seems like a lesson to me not to be too conceited. His mind has been very impressionable, and from what I can gather he has not been carrying on as he should.’

‘No, no, I’m afraid not!’

‘There was some sad scene with his young wife, I suppose.’

‘Well, I always think that it was a very insane, morbid proceeding, tinged with vanity, to shut yourself up as you have done these thirty years.’

‘I took an oath, when I found to what I was reduced, that I would never look upon the face of man again, and I have kept it.’

‘I should think that you were more likely to be forgiven for breaking such an oath than for keeping it,’ said the doctor drily.

‘But I have kept it!’ said Robert Millet sternly. ‘In a few short hours I found that I had lost all worth living for, and I retired here to die.’

‘Yes,’ said the doctor, in his bluff, dry way; ‘but when you found that you were so long dying, I think you might have done something useful.’

There was no reply to this, and the doctor loosed the thin white hand, and began to tap the little ledge by the panel.

‘I wrote down to Huish about his son’s illness,’ he said at last.

‘Yes: well?’ said the recluse eagerly.

‘He begged me to do all I could. He never leaves his room now. Gout or rheumatism has crippled

him. Strange how things come about with the young people.'

'Yes: I'm getting old now, and I wanted to feel full of forgiveness towards Huish, and that is why I took to his boy. It is hard that matters have turned out as they have.'

'Very,' said the doctor. 'Well, I'm not going to advise, but I should like to know that you had broken your oath at last, and let light into your brain as well as into your house. Good-bye; I'll let you know how John Huish gets on.'

Dr. Stonor went straight to Highgate and found what seemed an improvement in his patient, for Huish was sitting up; but he seemed strangely reticent and thoughtful, and never asked any questions as to his wife or his relatives, but seemed to be dreaming over something with which his mind was filled.

Time passed, and with closely cut hair, and a strange sallowness in his complexion, John Huish was up, and had been out times enough in the extensive garden, but there was a something in his manner that troubled the doctor a great deal, and was looked upon by him as a bad symptom. He was

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always dreaming over something, and what that was he never said.

Miss Stonor conversed with him, and he was gentle and talked rationally. He answered the doctor's questions reasonably enough, and yet, as soon as his attention was released, he was back again, dreaming over the one thing that seemed to trouble his mind.

'Will he get well?' said Miss Selina to the doctor one morning.

'I'd give something to be able to say,' was the reply. 'At times I think not, for I fear the impression upon his mind is that he is insane, and if a man believes that of himself, how can we get him to act like one who is sane?'

This was at breakfast-time, and the doctor soon after went out, leaving an assistant in charge.

It was a glorious afternoon, and Huish and the three patients were out in the garden, where Captain Lawdor was practising throwing biscuit, as he called it, at a stone balanced on the end of a stick. Mr. Rawlinson had a table out and was writing a series of minutes on railway mismanagement; and Mr.

Roberts was following John Huish about as he walked up and down beneath the old red-brick wall which separated the garden from the road.

This went on for a time, and then Mr. Roberts crept softly up to Huish, to whom he had not spoken since the night of the dinner, and said :

‘I told you not to look at that Egyptian sorcerer. I knew it would send you mad.’

‘Mad!’ exclaimed Huish, smiling. ‘I am not mad.’

‘Oh yes,’ said Mr. Roberts. ‘You came here and asked the doctor to cure you. No man could do that if he were not mad.’

‘Oh, nonsense!’ said Huish, looking at him strangely. ‘I am quite well.’

Mr. Roberts shook his head.

‘No, you are not ; I know how you feel, just like a man I knew used to feel. He always felt as if he were two ; and sometimes he was one, sometimes the other. The other was the one the lawyer said was dead. It was so sad, too, for her. What have you done with your wife?’

At last !

John Huish started as if he had been stung. That was the something he had, in a strange secretive way, tried to think of for days past—his wife ; and now the mention of her sent a shock like that of electricity through his brain.

He hurried away, and began to walk up and down, growing more and more excited. His wife ! Where was she ? Yes, he remembered now ; the mist that had shrouded his brain was dispelled, and he could think. That something like him had been and taken her away, and he was doing nothing here.

With all the cunning of an insane person he became very calm all at once, for the doctor's assistant strolled out in the garden just then, walked up to and spoke to him, and not seeing any change, went back to the house, while, glancing sharply round him, John Huish waited for an opportunity to put a plan that he had instantly matured into operation.

He had sense enough to know that he should be refused if he asked leave to go outside, so walking up and down for a few minutes, he suddenly made a run and a bound, caught the top of the wall and scrambled up, and dropped into the lane.

The captain raised a shout, and the assistant came running out, but by the time he reached the gate Huish had disappeared, taking as he did a short cut across the fields, while the assistant searched the road, and then, after fruitless efforts, hurried off to the nearest station, and made his way to Finsbury Circus. Here he broke the news to the doctor, who left him to finish his cases, and, calling Daniel, set off as fast as they could go to Westbourne Road, as being the most likely point for Huish to make for now he was free.

As soon as he had run sharply across the fields, John Huish subsided into a walk, and going along at a pretty good pace, made straight for his home.

To all appearances he was perfectly sane and in his right mind ; but there was only one dominant idea there, and to fulfil this he was hurrying on. Still there was a certain amount of strange caution developed in his acts. He seemed to know that there was something wrong with him, and that he must be cautious how he spoke to people ; and to this end he carefully avoided everyone who appeared to take the slightest notice of him, till he reached Westbourne

Road. There he rang the bell, and the door was answered by his domestic.

The servant looked at him strangely, but said nothing, and he hurried up to his room to try and remove any traces that might strike a stranger of his having been lately ill. His mind was clear enough for that, and as he hastily bathed his face, the cold water refreshed him and he felt more himself.

He was terribly confused, though, at times, and had to ask himself why he was there.

That acted as a touchstone—Gertrude—he had come to seek his wife ; he had escaped so that he might find her, for the doctor would not let him go. He told him—yes, he told him his wife was well, and he should see her soon ; but it was a lie to quiet him. That devil had got her—his other self. Of course—the servant and the cabman told him so ; but he must be quiet, or they would stop him. Perhaps the doctor had sent after him now.

He shuddered and gazed about him for a moment as if his mind were going beyond his control. Then, mastering himself once more, he took up his hat, opened the door, and passed out into the road.

CHAPTER XIII.

LORD HENRY RECEIVES A TELEGRAM.

‘I SHALL be waiting for you this evening at the Channel Hotel. It is an easy walk from the square. Ask to be shown to No. 99. If you are not there by ten o’clock, good-bye! There will be the report of a pistol heard. Without you I can bear my life no longer.’

Every word burned into her mind, and she seemed to be mentally repeating it constantly, even as some familiar tune will keep on humming in the brain.

‘If you are not there by ten o’clock there will be the report of a pistol heard.’

Marie felt that he would keep his word.

Over and over and over again, with dreary reiteration, those words kept recurring, and then, as the day

wore on and she went to her room, she found herself repeating them aloud.

She bathed her burning temples, but found no relief. She threw herself upon a couch, and tried to obtain rest, but those words kept on, and she repeated them as if they were a lesson, till everything seemed dreamlike and strange, and she wondered whether she had really met Glen that morning.

At last she dropped into a feverish, uneasy sleep, the result of her weariness, but the words kept on, and she felt that she was repeating them as she went straight on towards a thick darkness, whose meaning she could not penetrate. All she knew was that she was irresistibly impelled towards that darkness, and it made her shudder as she drew nearer and nearer, till she felt that her next step would be into this strange mystery, when she found herself confronted by Ruth.

‘Are you ill, dear?’

‘No, not ill; only weary in spirit, dear. There, I am better now. But tell me about yourself. Have you seen Montaigne lately?’

‘Yes,’ said Ruth with a shiver. ‘He seems to

watch and follow us. He was in Piccadilly this morning as we came back from the Academy.'

'The insolent !' said Marie calmly. 'Is it time to dress ?'

'Oh no,' cried Ruth, looking curiously at her cousin's ashy face. 'You have been to sleep, and forgotten how time goes.'

'Have I? Yes, I suppose I have. Let me see, there is no one coming to dinner to-night ?'

'No, not to-night,' said Ruth, gazing with wondering eyes at her cousin.

'No, no, of course not ! My brain feels hot and confused to-day. I shall be better soon !'

She rose, and then descended with Ruth to the drawing-room, chatting calmly with her over the five o'clock tea, and seemed as if she had forgotten the morning's incident. This went on till the dressing-bell rang, when, placing her arm round her cousin, she went with her upstairs to their several rooms, kissing her affectionately, and bidding her not be late.

Marie looked perfectly calm when they met again in the drawing-room, where Lord Henry was awaiting their descent, and as Ruth entered she saw her cousin

half seated upon one of the arms of a lounge, resting her soft white arm upon her husband's shoulder as she bent down and kissed him tenderly upon the forehead.

She did not start away, but rose gravely, and directly after, dinner was announced, and Lord Henry took Ruth down.

The dinner passed off much as usual. The conversation was carried on in the quiet, calm way customary at that house, and Lord Henry smiled gravely and pleasantly first at one, then at the other, as he retailed to them, in his simple, placid manner, some piece of news that he had heard at the club, to which Marie listened with her quiet deference to her husband, whose slightest word seemed always to rouse her to listen.

When they rose Lord Henry left his chair in the most courtly way to open the door for them, Marie drawing back for Ruth to pass out first, while she hesitated, before placing her arms round her husband's neck. She kissed him on his forehead, holding him tightly to her for a moment or two, and then she passed into the hall and began to ascend

the stairs, looking handsomer than she had ever looked to him before, as she went up with the soft glow of the lamp shining down upon her pale face.

As she reached the first landing she smiled back at him in a strange way, hesitating for a moment or two before passing out of his sight.

‘God bless her!’ said the old man, with tears in his eyes. ‘I wish I was years younger—for her sake.’

He returned to his chair, poured out his customary glass of port-wine, and sat sipping it in a calm, satisfied spirit. So happy and at rest did he feel, that, for a wonder, he finished that glass and poured out another, which he held up to the light and examined with all the air of a connoisseur.

Then sip after sip followed, with the dark ancestral paintings seeming to look down warningly at him from the wall, till he finished that second glass and began to doze. Then the doze came to an abrupt conclusion, and his lordship started up, for he thought he heard the closing of a door, but his eyelids dropped lower and lower till they were shut, and this time he

slept deeply—so deeply that he did not hear the butler enter with his cup of coffee, which the old servitor placed softly upon the table, and then went out.

* * * * *

‘Eh? What?’ exclaimed Lord Henry, starting up.

‘Beg pardon for waking your lordship,’ said the butler, holding out a silver salver, upon which was a reddish-brown envelope; ‘but here is a telegram.’

‘Telegram? Bless me!’ exclaimed the old man, fumbling in rather a confused way for his glasses. ‘I hope—nothing wrong!’

His hands trembled as he opened the envelope and took out the message, while as he read the pencilled words his jaw dropped, and the old butler took a step forward.

‘My lord!’

These words brought him to himself.

‘That will do, Thompson. I will ring.’

The old butler glanced at his master uneasily, but obeyed, and then Lord Henry, with palsied hand,

held the sham telegram to the lamp and read once more :

‘From Smith, West Strand.

‘To Lord Henry Moorpark,

‘300, St. James’s Square.

‘If you care for your honour, follow her ladyship. She has gone to keep an appointment at Channel Hotel.’

He crushed the paper in his hand, and caught at the table for support.

Then he recovered, and drew himself up proudly.

‘It is a lie—a scandal!’ he said in a hoarse whisper. ‘The dog who could send that slur against my wife deserves to be hung!’

He tottered slightly at first as he walked, but he kept pulling himself together, twitching his head and crushing the paper more tightly in his hand, as he went slowly towards the door.

He would not hurry, he was too proud and full of trust and belief in Marie for that; and thrusting the telegram into his pocket, he, in his usual leisurely way, touched the bell for the dessert to be cleared away, threw open the door, and gave his customary cough as he crossed the hall before mount-

ing the handsome staircase, step by step, where Marie had turned when she left him a short time before.

The old man held his head up more and more erect as he went on, and when the butler came from below in answer to the bell, he noted that his lordship was humming in a low voice a snatch of an air that was often played in the square by the organs.

He was too chivalrous to believe the message, and in the calmest manner possible he placed his hand upon the door-knob, turned it, entered the softly-lit drawing-room, closed the door in his usual gentle way, and crossed towards Marie's chair, where she would be seated by the steaming urn, with Ruth reading aloud as was her wont.

'I have been thinking, my dear——' he said.

Then he stopped, perfectly calm, though both chairs were empty, and his lips quivered slightly.

'It is a lie—a cruel lie! God bless her! I'll not believe it!'

He muttered this as he went on, and was about to ring the bell, when he hesitated. Should he?—should he not?

It would be braver and better to do so, he thought, and would show his calm confidence to his servants.

But why should he trouble them? Poor sweet! her head had been aching a good deal that day, she said, and she had gone to lie down. Ruth, perhaps, was with her. He would go up and see.

He went slowly up to the bedroom—tapped; there was no answer, and he softly entered, to find the lights burning and something white upon the toilet-table—something white that caught his eye on the instant, and involuntarily he said :

‘A note!’

Of course—a note to explain why she was not there.

He glanced at himself in the long cheval-glass that had so often reflected the form of his beautiful wife. His face was very pale, but he could see that he looked perfectly cool and collected as he crossed to the toilet-table and took up the note.

He raised his glasses, and saw that it was open—a note directed in a feminine hand to Lady Henry Moorpark.

The note fell from his fingers and a frown gathered

on his brow as, after a few moments' hesitation, he walked rapidly out of the chamber and down into the drawing-room, where he rang the bell, and a footman came to the call.

'Has her ladyship gone out, Robert?'

'Yes, my lord.'

'And Miss Allerton?'

'Yes, my lord.'

'Did they have the carriage?'

'No, my lord; Miss Allerton went out directly after dinner, and her ladyship soon after.'

'That will do.'

The man left the room, and Lord Henry stood for a few minutes gazing straight before him, and with a strangely stern aspect in his face.

Love and chivalry were fighting hard with ordinary worldliness, and it was a question which would win.

'I ought to go,' he said at last—'I will go. Heaven knows that I do not—that I will not doubt her; but she is not here, and it is very strange. I will go.'

He went downstairs, all in the most calm and deliberate way, as if everything depended upon his being perfectly cool, and after ringing for one of the servants,

he was helped on with his light overcoat, his hat and gloves were handed to him, his black cane with its crutch handle, and he went quietly out into the square. He raised his cane as a hansom cab came by, got in, and was driven to the Channel Hotel, where he paid and dismissed the man.

An attendant was in the vestibule as he entered, and, beckoning to the man, he placed a half-sovereign in his hand, a feeling of shrinking on the increase, and the shame making him hesitate as he asked whether two ladies had come there since eight or nine o'clock.

‘Two ladies, without luggage? Yes, sir. And a gentleman. In Number 99, sir.’

Lord Henry hesitated again, for love and chivalry seemed to throw themselves in his way to prevent him from doing what he told himself was a mean action.

But he felt that he must go on now, and, going a little closer to the man, he said :

‘Take me up at once, and show me in without announcing my name.’

The man nodded, and led him up the great stair-

case, passing what seemed to be innumerable rooms before stopping at one where he waited for his lordship to come close up before throwing open the door for him to enter.

The telegram was right so far : Lady Henry Moorpark was there, but she was in company with Ruth.

So far good ; but Captain Marcus Glen, her old lover, was present, and Mr. Paul Montaigne.

Marie sank into the nearest chair. Paul Montaigne caught Ruth by the wrist, and whispered a few words ; while, on seeing who had come, Marcus Glen stepped boldly forward, and seemed ready to defend the woman he loved.

‘ Be silent,’ whispered Montaigne—‘ not a word ! Your only hope now is to cling to me.’

‘ May I ask what is the meaning of this meeting, Lady Henry ?’ asked his lordship. ‘ I had a telegram advising me to come here, and I find you in company with Captain Glen.’

‘ Who came to meet me, Lord Henry,’ cried Ruth, flinging off Montaigne’s grasp and clinging to Glen’s arm.

Glen directed one glance at Marie, who had turned

from him, and was standing with knitted brow, half-closed eyes, and blanched face, crushed down as it were by her shame, and with all a soldier's quickness of decision he determined to try and save her.

‘Let me explain, Lord Henry—Lady Henry,’ said Glen quickly. ‘I am to blame for this clandestine meeting. Lady Henry, you meant well by your pursuit, but you cannot alter matters now. Ruth accepts me as her husband, and nothing but force would take her away. If I have spoken too plainly, you must forgive me. Once more, I am to blame.’

‘Well acted,’ muttered Montaigne. ‘Now, my Lady Marie ; it is your turn now.’

But Marie stood as if stunned.

‘This is fine, heroic language, Captain Glen,’ said Lord Henry ; ‘may I ask to how many ladies you have used it before ?’

‘I deserve your rebuke, my lord,’ said Glen ; ‘but there comes a time to every man when he feels that he is in earnest. I am in earnest now.’

‘If, sir, you are in earnest, why did you not make your advances like a gentleman ?’

‘One moment,’ interposed Montaigne, who had now recovered himself, and stood with a smile upon his lip; ‘Lord Henry, I have been protector, tutor to these ladies from their childhood: I wish to say a few words to Captain Glen.’

Lord Henry bowed.

‘Ruth, my child,’ continued Montaigne, ‘leave Captain Glen for a few minutes.’

She shrank from him with such a look of revulsion that the rage in his breast flamed up again, and his craftiness for the moment failed.

‘Now, sir,’ said Glen sternly, and he looked menacingly at the man whom he blamed for the frustration of that night’s plans.

‘You have cleverly hoodwinked the poor old fool amongst you,’ whispered Montaigne, ‘but you have not blinded me. I have a prior claim to Miss Allerton’s hand, and I tell you this,’ he cried, his rage making him tremble, ‘that after this night, if you so much as approach her again, I’ll expose Marie to her husband—I’ll tell him all.’

Glen glanced at Marie, who was talking in a low voice to Lord Henry, while, suffering now from the

reaction, Ruth had sunk into a chair, trembling at what she had dared to do.

‘You understand,’ continued Montaigne, upon whose forehead the veins stood out. ‘That is my price for silence. Ruth is mine, or I drag that woman into the dust.’

He stood there with his face thrust forward, his hands clenched, and a fiercely vindictive look in his eyes, while Glen seemed to be weighing his position, but he was not. He let his eyes wander from Montaigne to Lord Henry. Then he glanced at Ruth, who for a moment met his gaze with a piteous, appealing glance, before flushing deeply, and drooping in very shame.

‘Heaven bless her, she is too good for me!’ thought Glen; ‘but before this scoundrel should lay hands upon her——’

‘You understand me,’ reiterated Montaigne; ‘now go.’

‘Understand you!’ whispered Glen; and as he spoke he laid one hand sharply on Montaigne’s shoulder, clutching him in so fierce a grip that he caused intense pain. ‘Yes; now understand me.’

Montaigne glared at him, and he suffered acutely, but he did not wince.

‘You have uttered your threats: now hear mine. That lady’s reputation is in your hands.’

‘Is this all?’ said Montaigne defiantly.

‘No,’ whispered Glen, placing his lips close to Montaigne’s ear; ‘I have not read your death-sentence: betray us, and I will kill you, so help me God!’

The two men were glaring at each other, and by degrees, as Montaigne’s face grew of a sickly, leaden hue, his eyelids drooped, and he shrank away.

Glen crossed to Ruth and took her hand.

‘Heaven bless you!’ he whispered. ‘I dare not say more to you now. I am not worthy, Ruth. Would I were a better man! Be kind to her, for she wants your aid.’

She did not speak, but stood there trembling, till he led her to Lord Henry.

‘Will you take her, sir?’ he said. ‘You will not refuse her a home for what has occurred?’

If Lord Henry Moorpark had felt any hesitation, it was chased away by the action of his wife, who caught her cousin to her heart.

‘Some day, Lady Henry—Lord Henry,’ continued Glen, ‘I will come as a gentleman, and ask that the past may be forgotten, and that Ruth Allerton may be my wife. Mr. Montaigne——’

He signed toward the door, and vainly trying to resist the stern eyes fixed upon him, Montaigne led the way, and was followed out.

CHAPTER XIV.

A WOMAN'S WORK.

DIRECTLY after leaving the dinner-table Ruth set herself to watch her cousin, asking herself the while what course she had better pursue.

At times she thought she would speak to Lord Henry, but she shrank from such an exposure. Marie would perhaps be saved from the step she evidently contemplated, but at what a cost! Her husband's confidence would be for ever gone, and the old man's happiness at an end.

Marie was very pale, but there was a red spot burning in either cheek, and as Ruth watched her she could see a deep frown upon her brow, while from time to time she pressed her hand upon her breast as if to still the beatings of her heart.

Then came those words she had heard Marie mutter perfectly distinctly in her unquiet sleep—the room she was to ask for at the Channel Hotel; the threat Marcus Glen had uttered respecting his action if she did not come; and as Ruth sat there in the terrible silence of the large drawing-room, she felt that if she did not do something at once the strain upon her mind would be more than she could bear.

All at once Marie gave a start, and drew in her breath as if in sudden pain. She seemed to forget the presence of Ruth, and, rising, walked quickly to the mantelpiece, pressing her hair back from her forehead, while, taking advantage of her back being turned, Ruth glided softly into the smaller drawing-room, which was in comparative darkness.

The idea had come at last. It seemed reckless and wild, but she knew that it was useless to appeal to Marie. She would go herself to Marcus Glen. He was noble-hearted and true. There was a simple manliness in his nature that made her hope, and she would kneel and appeal to him to spare her cousin, to pause before he wrecked the happiness of the good,

chivalrous old man who trusted his wife in the pride and nobleness of his heart.

‘I shall be too late,’ thought Ruth ; and, wound up now to a pitch of excitement which seemed to urge her to act, she softly turned the handle of the door, glided out, and without stopping to close it, ran up to her room.

Money she had, and in a very few minutes she had dressed herself for her task, and, closely veiled, she stepped softly to the door.

It opened silently, and she was about to glide downstairs, when she heard a faint rustle, and, drawing back, she peered through the nearly closed door, and saw Marie come up the stairs and enter her room.

Nerving herself for her task, she stepped out, and softly passed Marie’s room, hesitated for a moment as she heard a door close downstairs, and the servants’ voices ascending—all else was still in the great mansion ; and as quickly as she could she ran past the drawing-room door and down into the hall, where she stopped and clung to the great coil of the balustrade for support.

Her heart had failed her. There was that great dark door to pass, just beyond which, at the foot of the table, she knew Lord Henry was seated with his decanter and glass before him.

But just then a slight sound somewhere upstairs brought back the memory of Marie's face, and, hesitating no longer, she stepped quickly to the front door, her hand was upon the lock, and then she felt as if she were turned to ice, for the voice of the old butler said respectfully :

‘I will open it, ma'am.’

He had been seated in the great hall-porter's chair waiting for his lordship to leave the dining-room, and he now swung open the wide door for her to pass out.

She went down the two or three steps, feeling like one in a dream, wondering, though, whether the butler would go and tell Lord Henry that she had gone out, and feeling each moment, as she hurried along the pavement, that someone was about to place a hand upon her shoulder and bid her stay.

Her mouth felt dry, her breath came fast, and the throb of her pulses was painful ; but she was on her

way to the place of rendezvous, and it was to save those she loved from ruin.

There were wheels behind, and she stopped instinctively and looked round. It was an empty cab, and, taking this as a signal, the driver drew rein. Ruth mechanically stepped in, and then started as the little trap above her was opened, and the driver asked where to drive.

'Channel Hotel,' came mechanically from her lips, and in her agitation it only seemed a minute before she was in front of the great entrance.

'Take me to No. 99,' she said as indifferently as she could, and a waiter led the way.

She trembled so that she could hardly proceed, for the idea was horrible. What did she hear Marie say? Was it No. 99, at this hotel?

She was not sure now, and she felt faint and giddy as she followed the man upstairs, and along a wide corridor. Should she ask him to stop? She dare go no farther, and her lips moved to stay him, when he paused by a door. Before she could find breath to speak or power of utterance, he tapped lightly, and she heard him say :

‘A lady to see you, sir.’

There was the noise of a chair pushed quickly back, and a heavy tread upon the carpet as she entered, moved, it seemed to be, by some power that was not her own. Then as the door closed behind her she saw that she was right, for, exclaiming loudly, ‘Marie! my darling!’ Glen caught her in his arms.

‘Captain Glen!’

Ruth struggled indignantly from him, and snatched off her veil.

He staggered back.

‘Ruth! you here?’ he cried.

‘Yes. I was compelled to come. Marie—my cousin—Lady Henry—Oh, Captain Glen!’

‘Is she ill? Has she sent you? Do you know?’ he whispered hoarsely.

‘She has not sent me,’ cried Ruth. ‘She does not know I have come. Oh, Captain Glen!’ she cried, sobbing violently as she threw herself upon her knees and clasped his feet, ‘for heaven’s sake, spare her! Do not bring down such misery upon that home.’

‘Ruth, my child, hush! for heaven’s sake!’

‘No, no, no, no!’ sobbed Ruth, and she went on

incoherently as she clung to his feet: 'You are not thinking of the horror of your crime. You do not love her—you cannot care for her, or you would not drive her to this terrible sin.'

'Not love her—Marie? Is she coming?'

'I pray heaven, no,' said Ruth simply. 'I would sooner see her dead.'

'Then I will go and fetch her,' cried Glen, furious with disappointment. 'I will not bear it; I cannot bear it. I'll tear her away from him—but no,' he said bitterly, 'I promised something else, and I know she will come.'

'Is this Marcus Glen?' said Ruth simply, as she remained there upon her knees; 'is this the man who I told Marie was the soul of truth and honour?'

'No; it is the poor deluded, wretched man who has been twice tricked and cozened of his love. It is useless; I cannot, I will not listen to you!'

'You shall!' she cried, springing to her feet. 'You shall go away from here, for she shall not leave her home for you. I would die sooner than see this shame brought upon her. Coward, to force me, a

mere girl, to speak to you as I do! Oh, it is cruel, it is shameful, and yet you talk of love!

‘Hush!’ he cried, as she stood before him’ flushed with her indignation; ‘what do you know of love?’

‘That there is no such thing, if it is to bring shame and disgrace on a weak woman, and death and dishonour upon a good, confiding man. Oh, where is God, that He does not strike you dead for even thinking such a cruel wrong!—Marie, Marie, you shall not go!’

For as she spoke in the anger and bitterness of her heart, the door opened, and, veiled and in a large black cloak, Marie glided in, to shrink cowering away in horror and shame, holding up her hands to keep Ruth off, but in vain, for the girl flung her arms round her, and then turned her head, so as to face Glen.

‘You here, Ruth!’

‘Yes, to save you from this shame. Oh, Marie, think of dear Lord Henry!’ she cried passionately; ‘think of the disgrace, the horror and remorse to come!’

‘I have thought till I can think no more,’ moaned Marie. ‘Oh, Ruth, Ruth, why did you come?’

‘In heaven’s name, yes! Why did you come?’ cried Glen fiercely, as he tried to tear the couple apart.

‘No; keep off!’ cried Ruth. ‘I have told you why: because I would not stand by and be a witness of this shame.’

‘But, Ruth, you do not know; you cannot tell. It is too late now.’

‘I tell you it is not too late!’

‘Yes, my child, it is,’ said a low, soft voice; and there stood Paul Montaigne, with his calm aspect and bland smile. ‘It is too late; the step is taken by you, Ruth, as well as by Marie here. Captain Glen, I will see that Miss Allerton comes to no harm.’

‘By what right do you intrude?’ cried Glen hotly.

‘The right of an old protector of these ladies,’ said Montaigne, smiling. ‘There, do not be angry, my dear sir. I come as a friend. Their interests have been mine for so many years that I, knowing something of the tender passion myself, can sympathize with all. Mind, I do not counsel flight, and if I had

been consulted I should not have hesitated to stop you ; but as you have taken the irrevocable step, all I can say is—go, get the divorce over as soon as possible, and then I insist upon your marrying my darling ward.'

'Of course, of course !' cried Glen angrily. 'Marie, my love,' he whispered, 'come.'

'No, no !' cried Ruth, interposing, and clinging to her cousin's arm. 'Marie dear, you will come back ?'

Marie looked at her in a piteously helpless fashion, and shook her head.

'My dearest Ruth,' said Montaigne, 'your interference is ill-timed. You are fighting against fate. Come, come ! I know it seems very dreadful to you, but you must let matters have their course.'

He advanced to take her hand, but she shrank from him with horror.

'No, no !' she cried. 'Why do not you interfere ?'

'Captain Glen, your train must be nearly due.'

'And Ruth ?' said Glen, hesitating. 'Will you see her back ?'

'Hardly,' said Montaigne, smiling. 'She cannot return there ; but you can rest content if she is

under my charge. Recollect, sir, I have known her almost from a child.'

'Mr. Montaigne is right ; you are fighting against the irrevocable. The step is taken, and Marie cannot return. Now, for all our sakes, pray go !'

'With Mr. Montaigne ?' cried Ruth excitedly. 'No ; I will not go ; and I will not leave Marie !'

'Then, in heaven's name, go with us !'

'No !' said Montaigne fiercely ; 'Ruth goes with me !'

'Marcus Glen—Marie—I claim your protection from this man !' cried Ruth excitedly.

'Then you shall come !' cried Glen. 'Marie, be firm,' he whispered. 'Now, Mr. Montaigne—you hear Miss Allerton's decision ; stand aside !'

'Miss Allerton stays with me !' said Montaigne firmly ; and, in place of giving way, he stepped forward, and an angry collision seemed imminent, when the door was once more thrown open, and Lord Henry Moorpark, looking blanched and old, came into the room.

Ruth had gained her end.

CHAPTER XV.

FACE TO FACE.

JOHN HUISSH'S brain was still confused. At times he was ready to give way to the idea that he must be quite mad, and at such times he had a dire mental struggle to master the wild rush of thoughts so that he might get one uppermost and let it have due course—that one wild idea that he must bring himself face to face with the fiend who mocked his existence, had tortured him for years, and who lived in his semblance; and he felt in nowise surprised, as he passed down the road, at seeing himself, dressed exactly as he then was, turn suddenly out of a side-street and walk rapidly towards the house he had just left.

‘At last!’ he said beneath his breath; and he drew back into a garden to avoid being seen.

He was in nowise surprised either, as, with the cunning of a madman, he watched till his semblance went straight up to the house and knocked; and, feeling that he would enter, Huish stole slowly out of his hiding-place and followed.

‘Trapped!’ he said in a low voice. ‘Only room for one of us in this little world.’

His teeth grated together, his fingers were tightly clenched, and he crept on towards the gateway of his house, hidden by the tall privet hedge within the railings, and reached the entry just as his semblance came back from the door frowning and savage with disappointment at the result of his quest of her who had disappeared just as he had triumphed in his heart over a long-cherished idea of revenge.

The two men were face to face; and with a cry of savage delight John Huish sprang at his semblance’s throat, but to be met by a blinding flash and a tremendous blow, which sent him staggering back, clutching vainly at the railings before he fell upon the pavement and rolled over and over half stunned.

He sprang to his feet, though, and gnashed his teeth with rage as he looked up and down and saw

that a couple of the very few people about, alarmed by the shot, were coming to his assistance, but him he sought was gone.

Before anyone could reach him, John Huish had started off running hard to the bottom of the road, chancing which way the man he hunted had gone, and was just in time to see him enter a hansom, to be rapidly driven off.

Running pretty quickly, he became aware that he was exciting attention, and, remembering his appearance, he subsided into a slower pace, for another cab was on ahead, and he hailed it just in time.

‘Follow that hansom!’ he cried to the man as he leaped in. ‘Double fare.’

The horse sprang forward, and to his great satisfaction he saw that he gained upon the fugitive, so he sat back patiently waiting, with the determination now to hunt him down.

Mad or sane, there was but one thought still in John Huish’s brain, and that was to get this fiend, this haunting demon, by the throat. Whether he was human or some strange creature from another world,

he had ceased now to speculate; his head had been troubled with too much stress. All he felt was that they two could not exist together upon earth: that was his evil half, and he must kill it.

Once or twice a thrill of mad rage made his nerves tingle, for he seemed to see Gertrude resting lovingly in that other's arms, responding to his caresses, smiling in his face, and blessing him with her love; and at such moments his brain whirled like one of the wheels by his side.

The sight of the cab in front drove these thoughts away, though, and, clenching his teeth, he shook his head as if to clear his brain for the one object in view.

And now, for the first time, he became aware of a strange pain, and of something warm trickling down beside his ear, and putting up his hand, he withdrew it covered with blood.

'He could not kill me,' he muttered, taking out his handkerchief and applying it to where the bullet had struck the top of his head and glanced off, making a deep cut which bled freely.

He did not know it then, but it was the one thing

for which he had reason to thank the man he pursued. Though sent with a mission to destroy, it was the saving of his life.

On still through the crowded streets, which were empty to John Huish, for he saw nothing but the cab before him. As in his then wild state there seemed to be room in the world for but one of them two, so in his vision there was room but for the single object he pursued.

There were turnings and checks, and more than once the cab was nearly lost ; but the driver he had knew his work, and twice over, when Huish was about to leap out and continue the pursuit on foot, there was the cab on ahead.

Over a bridge, and then down a turning for a short cut. Yes, he must be making for Waterloo Station ; and as Huish sprang out he saw the man he sought at the ticket-office, and darted towards him.

The fugitive looked round in the act of taking his ticket, saw the wild face of Huish, and turned and fled, with his pursuer hunting him like a dog and close upon his heels.

Without a moment's hesitation, on reaching the platform, he ran to the right, doubled back along the next, leaped down on the line, crossed it, reached the next platform, doubled again in and out, amidst the shouts of the porters, passed through a tangle of trains and empty carriages, and so reached again another platform, before glancing back to find Huish doggedly on his track.

A wild, strange look of horror came into his face as he glanced around him, seeking which way to go, and for the moment he made for the way down to the waterside by Hungerford Bridge ; but a train was on the point of starting—not the one for which he had taken a ticket, but anywhere would do, so that he could get away from the madman who hunted him like fate.

He dashed to the gate just as it was closed, and the stern official uttered the words, ' Too late.'

He glanced over his shoulder, and saw that John Huish was within ten yards, and half a dozen porters in pursuit. Had he possessed the presence of mind now to face him, he had but to say, ' This is an escaped lunatic,' to see Huish secured.

But his nerve was gone, and in his horror he glanced wildly from place to place, ran a few yards, dashed through another gate, and ran along another platform just as the train was gliding away by the next.

Shouts and orders to stop reached him, but they fell upon ears that heard nothing, and, boldly leaping down at the end of the platform, he ran along the line, caught the handle of one of the carriages about the middle of the train, and climbed on to the foot-board.

‘Safe!’ he muttered. ‘Curse him! he is a devil incarnate!’

As he spoke he climbed into the compartment, which proved to be empty; and then, with a smile of triumph, he thrust his head out of the window to gaze back at his discomfited pursuer; for the engine was now rapidly gathering speed, and being one of the long-distance trains, it would probably run ten or a dozen miles without stopping.

As he looked out, though, his eyes became fixed and his teeth chattered together with horror, for there, far back, standing on the footboard of the guard’s

break, was John Huish, and as the young men's eyes met there was a strange kind of fascination which held the fugitive to the window, while his pursuer seemed to come nearer and nearer till their eyes almost touched.

Occurring as these incidents did on the off side of the train, they had not been seen by the guard, who was in profound ignorance of what had taken place, while the officials at the terminus gave him the credit of seeing the strange passengers, and taking such steps as were necessary at the first stopping station. But he saw nothing till, looking out, about a couple of miles down the line, he saw John Huish standing on the footboard, and the next minute he entered the brake.

To the guard's remarks there was no reply, and finding himself in company with a wild-looking man, with closely cut hair, his head bleeding, and who paid no heed to his words, he was about to check the train ; but as his hand was stretched out to the wheel that bore the line, John Huish's eyes blazed up and he shrank back, afraid to enter into an encounter with one whom he looked upon as mad.

‘Where do you stop first?’ said Huish at last.

‘Bulter Lane,’ replied the man, naming a station some fourteen miles down the line; and John Huish was silent during the half-hour’s run, while the guard kept glancing anxiously out at the stations they passed, and longed for help to rid him of his strange companion.

They were over two miles from their destination when, before he could arrest him, the guard saw Huish—who had been leaning out of the window, first on one side, then on the other—suddenly open the door, step down, and leap from the train.

‘Why, there’s another!’ he cried, looking out. ‘I wonder they haven’t broken their necks.’

Had he been gazing out as the train ran on through the pretty country place, he would have seen the fugitive, after anxiously looking ahead, suddenly step down upon the footboard, leap forward, stagger as his feet touched the ballast, and then go down on hands and knees, but to get up and begin walking fast to the boundary hedge, which he crossed just as John Huish also took his leap from the train, alighted in safety, and once more began the pursuit.

‘Why, the hunt’s t’other way on,’ cried the guard excitedly, as he looked back. ‘Madman’s hunting his keeper, I think; and he’ll have him too,’ he added, as the train thundered rapidly along, and they glided into the station, his last glimpse of the two strange passengers being as they ran across a meadow nearly two miles back. He gave information to the station-master, and two or three passengers who had seen the fugitive leave the carriage, and whose destination this proved to be, set off at a trot in the direction taken by the hunted man, while, after telling the engine-driver and stoker that it was a rum start, the guard resumed his place and the train continued its way.

It was a desperate leap, but in the dread which had seized him, the fugitive would have taken one of greater danger, for something seemed to tell him that he was fleeing from death, and that death was the stronger of the two.

He fell heavily, and cut his knees and hands upon the rough gravel, but he was up again, leaped the hedge beside the lane, and was hurrying across the meadow in the hope that Huish would not miss him until he reached the next station.

Glancing back, though, when he had run some fifty yards, he uttered a shriek that was like that of a frightened woman, for he could see Huish passing the hedge, and now he knew it was a trial of speed and endurance.

‘He’ll kill me,’ he cried hoarsely, as with trembling hands he pulled out the revolver from his breast, and, thrusting a hand into his pockets, sought for a cartridge to replace that which he had fired ; but his fingers refused their office ; and giving up the task, he ran on across meadow after meadow, checked by the hedges, and aiming afterwards at the gates.

A grim smile overspread his face as, after about a mile had been covered, he glanced back to see that he was the faster of the two, and, aiming for the open country, he pressed on.

‘I shall tire him out,’ he muttered as he toiled on, feeling disposed to throw away the revolver, but fearing to part with what might prove the means of saving his life.

The country was wooded and park-like ; and with a strange perversity he sought the open, when he might have obtained help had he sought the nearest

village. It was as if, in this time of peril, he, the clever, scheming, ready-witted man, had lost all command over his actions, and every nerve seemed concentrated upon the sole thought of fleeing from his pursuer.

They were too far ahead in their start to be seen by the porters who ran up the line from the station, and then followed their footprints across the meadows, so that there were no witnesses to the savage, relentless pursuit of the one, and the blind, terror-stricken flight of the other.

The pursued was right : unchecked by illness and confinement, he was the swifter of the two, gradually placing more distance between himself and his pursuer ; but he had not calculated upon the latter's stern determination.

For after a few minutes, in place of exerting himself to overtake his quarry, John Huish settled down into a steady, plodding run, husbanding his strength, and contented to keep his double in sight.

A few minutes later, as he still kept his eyes upon the man ahead, he slipped off his coat and steadily

ran on, easier now that he was freed from this encumbrance.

A mile was covered, then, more slowly, another, and now the exertions of pursuer and pursued showed in the sluggish pace at which they toiled on. Huish's face was black with the heat, and the veins in his forehead were starting, his breath came thick and fast; and now, dragging off his vest, collar, and tie, one by one, he threw them aside, and seeming to nerve himself as he saw his enemy stagger in his track, he increased his pace.

Fields were everywhere, save that in the distance were the spires of a couple of churches. At the end of a hundred more yards they came suddenly upon a wide expanse of undulating common-land, dotted with clumps of Scotch firs, and tufts of gorse and bracken, offering plenty of places of concealment to a hunted man, could he but reach one unseen.

But Huish was too close, while now the endurance was telling over speed, and as, like a hunted hare, the pursued glanced back with wild and starting eyes, he could see that his pursuer was gaining steadily, and the distance between them becoming short.

The afternoon sun cast long shadows, and glorified the golden gorse and bronzed the dark-green pines, while ever and again a rabbit scuttled away to its safe sanctuary in the sandy earth, and turned as if to gaze pityingly at the hunted stranger. Now and then, too, a blackbird darted away, uttering its alarm note, while high overhead in the peaceful arch of heaven a lark sent forth its trill of joy and peace.

Peace, while war to the death was in preparation for enactment by those two men, who, with blood-shot eyes, hot, dry tongues, and hoarse breathing, stumbled on over the heath and gorse ! All around was a scene of silent beauty, such as the wild parts of Surrey can display in the greatest perfection ; but bird, wild-flower, the mellow afternoon sunshine, all were as naught to John Huish, who saw but the tottering figure some forty yards ahead, and with his chest seeming to be aflame, the foam at his lip, and the taste of hot blood in his mouth, he toiled on.

‘ I can go no farther ! ’ panted the man he pursued, as, after wildly looking round for help, he made for a clump of firs, to one of which he clung as if to steady

himself as he laid the pistol against the trunk and fired, while his pursuer was twenty yards away.

The bullet whizzed by John Huish's head as he came on, and there was another report and the strange singing noise of a second bullet, but he passed on unharmed. His bloodshot eyes were fixed upon the half-hidden figure by the fir-tree, now not ten yards away—now not five, as there was a flash, a report, and a jerking feeling in his left arm.

The next moment the hunted man had dropped the pistol and turned to flee, running amongst the trees to where there was a hollow beneath a bank of yellow sand, capped with golden broom, and here he crouched, half turned away, thrusting one arm into a rabbit burrow, pressing himself against the crumbling soil, and literally shrieking in a wild, hoarse way as might some rat that has been hunted into a corner where there is no escape.

As Huish came at him he made another effort to flee, running a few yards, shrieking still in his agony of fear, more like some wild creature than a man. Then in his horror he faced round just as, gathering up his remaining strength, Huish sprang at his breast

and they fell, the latter lying upon his enemy's chest with his hands feebly clasping his throat.

'At last !' he panted with a savage laugh, and then lay helpless. He had overtaken his enemy, the creature who had blasted his life, maddened him, and robbed him of his fame and all he loved, and now he was helpless as a child.

For a time there was the hoarse panting of their laboured breath, and the eyes of the two men alone engaged in deadly strife ; their limbs were completely paralyzed. The sun sank lower, casting the shadows of the pines across them, and, emboldened by the silence, the furze chats twittered here and there, while from the distance came the soft mellow caw of a rook in homeward flight. Then from the dry grass hard by came the shrill crisp *chizz* of the grasshopper, and soft and deep from the clump of firs the low rattling whir of the evejar preparing for its hawking flight round the trees in quest of the moths and beetles that formed its fare.

But one thing in the soft evening beauty seemed to accord with the passions and hellish fury of the two men, and that was the low hiss and writhing

shape of a short thick viper which glided slowly from beneath one tuft of heath where it had been driven by the coming footsteps, to seek its lurking-place beneath another.

For fully twenty minutes, panting, heated, exhausted, did the two men lie there, glaring into each other's eyes. Once only did the hunted move, and his hand stole softly towards his breast-pocket; but it was pinioned on the instant, and he lay prone, waiting his time.

Meanwhile the sobbing hoarse murmur of their breathing grew more subdued, the heavy beating of their hearts more even, and the great drops of sweat ceased to trickle down from neck and temple, to coalesce, and then drop upon the grass. The feeling of helplessness, of paralyzed muscles, passed away, and with the fire in his eye growing fiercer as he felt his strength returning, John Huish uttered a sigh of content as he told himself that he could now crush out the life of the creature who had destroyed his happy life.

The sun sank lower as he gazed down at the face beneath him. It was like looking at his own angry

countenance in a mirror, and for the moment he was startled ; but that passed away, for the thought of Gertrude came like a flash through his insane brain.

It was for vengeance.

‘Devil!’ he cried hoarsely ; and with one sharp movement he struck at the prostrate man.

The latter had seen the change in his countenance, and was prepared for the assault. With the activity of a panther he seized the coming hand, and throwing up his chest as he bent his spine like a bow, he tried to throw his adversary off, and then a deadly struggle began.

At this moment there was little difference in the physical power of the two adversaries. Huish, though, from his position had the advantage, one that he fought hard to keep. At first it seemed that he would lose it, for, having somewhat recovered from his horror and fear of death, the hunted man threw the strength he had been husbanding into his first effort, flung John Huish aside, and nearly escaped. His advantage, however, was but a matter of minutes, for Huish steadily held on, and he was never able to rise to his feet. The grass was crushed down, the

purple heather broken, and the sand torn up, while, growing giddy and weak with his exertions, the old fear came back, and once more the man lay prone upon his back, gazing up into Huish's relentless eyes, and shuddered at the remorseless countenance he saw.

Then he raised his head slightly to try and look round for help, but he could see nothing but the setting sun, now glorifying the whole scene of peace made horrible by the life-and-death struggle that was going on. He thought of the past, of his wife, and as a strange singing arose in his ears, it seemed to take the form of words imploring for mercy—the mercy that he would not show.

‘I can't die—I am not fit to die!’ he gasped. ‘John Huish, have mercy on me!’

He shuddered as his adversary burst into a wild, hoarse laugh, and glared down at him; and truly his face was horrible, distorted as it was by passion, his brow smeared with blood from the wound in his head, and every vein knotted and standing out from his exertions.

‘He is mad!’ the man muttered, as he saw the wild look in the other's eyes, and once more he shrieked

aloud. 'No, no! do not kill me!' he cried; 'I cannot die!'

'Not die!' cried Huish. 'We shall see!'

He tightened his hands now fiercely, when, with almost superhuman strength, the hunted man made a dying effort to wrench away his neck, shrieking out: 'Huish—John Huish—mercy—do not kill—I am—your brother!'

John Huish's hands relaxed their grasp, and a strange pang of fear and wonder combined struck through his brain. This man—his very self in appearance—his double—who knew his every act, his very life, and who had impersonated him again and again—was it possible?

He stared down at the distorted countenance before him, his hands clawed and held a few inches from the prostrate man's throat, while doubt and incredulity struggled for the mastery. Then a curious smile crossed his face as his former thought re-mastered his beclouded brain.

'Another wile—a trick—a lie, for a few more moments' breath!' he cried, catching him by the throat once more. 'It is a lie, and you are a devil!'

‘Mercy, help!’ shrieked the other once more.

‘Huish—John—would you kill your brother?’

‘I have no brother.’

‘I am the son of James Huish and Mary Riversley!’ cried the other with starting eyes; and then, as the young man loosed him once more, he cried: ‘It is true, I call God to witness—it is true!’

John Huish clasped his forehead with his hands, and tried to comprehend the fact thus suddenly brought before his clouded brain.

‘You—my brother?’

‘Ask in the other world!’ yelled the other, as, with a stroke like lightning, he struck Huish full in the shoulder with a long keen-bladed knife, and, with a low groan, the young man fell over sidewise, and lay motionless amongst the heath.

‘Curse him!’ hissed the man savagely, as he rose to his feet, and then sank down feeling faint and giddy. ‘I’m sick as a dog. I’m torn to pieces. Curse him, it was time to strike!’

He wiped the blood from his hands, sought for and picked up the revolver that had fallen before the struggle began, and came back to think.

‘Not room for two John Huishes,’ he said, with a coarse laugh.

‘Shall I go on with the game?’ he said at last. ‘Yes? No? Too late. I shall be hunted down for this. The Baillestone people must know of the jump from the train. He will be found here to-morrow. I must get back.’

He bent over the prostrate man for a few moments, gazing at his calm, placid face, which now in the twilight seemed sleeping.

‘Poor devil!’ he muttered; ‘I didn’t want your life, but if, as you said, there was only room for one of us, why, you had to go! Brother, eh? Good-bye, dear brother Abel; I’m going to play Cain with a vengeance now; but my mark is on my arm, and not on my brow. Curse it, how it throbs and burns!’

With a low inspiration of the breath he hurriedly threw off his coat, and drew up his shirt-sleeve, for half was torn away in the struggle, and laying bare a great puckered scar upon his arm, it showed red and fiery, probably, though, from injury in the struggle.

‘It is nothing, I suppose. One would think he had had the bite, and not I. Rabid as a maddened dog!’

He hastily drew on his coat, shivering with cold and horror.

‘That would be horrible,’ he muttered, ‘to go mad like a dog! What a fool I am! I shall stay here till I am taken.’

He glanced sharply round, and then started off at a steady walk, thankful for the coming shades of night, which would hide his disordered apparel.

His figure had hardly grown faint in the distance when a couple of young men crossing the common with rod and basket on their shoulders came upon the prostrate form of John Huish, as they chatted carelessly of the day’s sport.

‘Drunk, or a tramp?’ said one.

‘Both,’ said the other carelessly, as he glanced at the figure. ‘By Jove! Harry, there’s blood. It’s suicide!’

They hurried to the spot, and there was still light enough to display the tokens of the fierce struggle in the trampled turf, and the torn neck of the injured man’s shirt.

‘It’s murder!’ cried the first speaker. ‘Run for help!’

‘Here it is!’ said the other excitedly, as several figures were seen approaching; and he uttered a loud shout.

‘What is it? Have you found them?’ cried the first of the fresh party, panting.

‘Found this man—he’s dead.’

‘We’ve been hunting them for long enough,’ said the other. ‘Yes, that’s one; here’s his coat and waist-coat. Good God! is he dead?’

‘I don’t know,’ said the man, leaning over Huish’s body. ‘He’s got an ugly wound. I wonder who he is?’

‘I know,’ said the man who had come up. ‘We have found his pocket-book and a letter. His name’s Huish—John Huish—and the letter’s from a doctor—Stonor, I think the name is.’

‘Never mind the name as long as it is a doctor!’ cried the man who knelt by Huish. ‘Someone run for him. Here, who’s got a flask?’

CHAPTER XVI.

NIGHT ROOM FOR TWO.

THE hunted man's wife sat watching at her window hour after hour, as she had watched days and nights before—bitter, vindictive, dwelling on the cruelty, the blows and wrongs, from which she had suffered at this man's hands, and from the woman who played the part of mother to him—jealous tyrant to her.

‘I have forgiven so much,’ she said, ‘and would forgive again—anything but this! So young, and handsome, and fair! He'll find her again, and bring her back, and then I may go. Why didn't he kill me outright?’ she added bitterly, as she went slowly to the lamp, took it up, and held it so that she could gaze at her bruised face in the glass.

It was a handsome face, but bitterly vindictive now, as she gazed at the bruises and an ugly cut upon her lip.

‘Better have killed me for letting her go. He hates me now. Yes,’ she said sadly ; ‘better do it at once—better do it.’

But she crossed the room again with a sigh to open the door and listen, habit mastering anger and bitterness, as a look of eagerness and longing such as had often been there before came into her face. It was the old anxious look with which she had watched for him who did not come. Then, by degrees, the look faded out, and her brow contracted as bitter thoughts prevailed.

It was getting late now, and she lit the candles in an automatic fashion, pausing at intervals to think. Then, going to the little sideboard, she took out a glass and the spirit decanter, half full of brandy, placing both on the sideboard ready before seating herself at the open window to listen. Nine o’clock struck, then ten, and the half-hour had chimed, but still he did not return.

There were a couple of figures, one at either end of

the lane, but they did not attract her attention, and she still sat listening till a faint noise below made her start up and hurry to the door.

Yes, at last. Someone coming up the stairs two steps at a time. The door was flung open, and her husband entered hastily, looking pale and disordered. There was so jaded and despairing an aspect in the man's eyes that the woman's sympathies were aroused, her troubles were for the moment forgotten, and she laid her hand upon his arm.

'Back at last, John dear!' she said tenderly. 'Are you tired?' And then something in his face startled her. 'John dear!' she cried.

'Curse John!' he cried. 'There, I have done with that masquerading. Here, quick—my little bag—a change of things!'

'Are you hurt?' she cried anxiously.

'Do you hear me?' he cried, and struck at her savagely with the back of his hand.

She staggered back with a low moan, but sprang to him the next moment, and threw her arms round his neck.

'John dearest,' she whispered, in a low, frantic

tone, 'for God's sake tell me you are sorry you did that. For your own sake ask me to forgive you ; it makes me mad !'

'Curse you, keep away !' he cried, flinging her off ; but she staggered back, and tried to nestle in his breast, only to be flung off again. 'Get me my clean things—quick !'

'No, no, not yet !' she cried, falling upon her knees and grasping at his hands. 'John, dear John, one kind word ; say one gentle word to me, pray, oh, pray !'

'Are you mad ?' he said savagely, as he tried to release his hand.

'No ; but you are driving me so !' she cried hoarsely 'I forgive you your infidelity, your unkindness—everything—the way in which you have wronged me. John—husband—for God's sake, for your own sake, be kind to me now. You do not know the temptation that is on me.'

'To run away and leave me ?' he said mockingly. 'Pray go.' He stood glaring down at her for a moment, and then exclaimed, in a cold, cutting way : 'Will you get me the things I want ?'

‘Yes, yes, dear—yes, my own love!’ she cried excitedly; ‘in one minute. But John, husband, my heart is nearly broken. I am maddened by my wrongs.’

He must have been mad himself, for as she clung to him he struck her again, more savagely this time, and, with a shudder running through her whole frame, she cowered on the floor.

But it was only for the moment. She struggled up again, joining her hands together as she wailed once more :

‘I ask you again, for our dead babe’s sake, John—husband—give me one kind word, and I will forgive all!’

‘Do you want to drive me wild!’ he yelled savagely. ‘I am not John Huish—I am not your husband. Out of my sight, or——’

He raised his hand again to strike her, but she did not flinch. She stood up, seeming as if turned to stone, and a sickly pallor appeared on her cheeks.

‘There, quick; get me the brandy! I have a long way to go.’

‘Yes,’ she said quietly, as a low moan escaped her lips ; ‘you have a long way to go.’

She fetched the brandy decanter and glass from the sideboard, placed them before him, and he poured out a goodly quantity, raised the glass, listened, and then put it down.

‘Who’s below?’ he said sharply, as he turned towards the door.

‘Jane Glyne,’ she said, moaning ; and then once more she tried to clasp his neck.

‘What’s the matter with you?’ he cried mockingly, as he thrust her arm away, and, catching up the glass, he raised it to his lips.

‘No, no!’ she cried, her coldness giving way to a look of horror ; ‘don’t drink it ;’ and she threw up her hands to seize the glass. But once more his hand fell heavily upon her, and she shrank away, covering her bruised face with her fingers, as he drained the glass and then dropped it, to shiver to atoms on the fender.

‘What! That brandy?’ he cried, with his face convulsed. ‘What have you given me to drink?’

‘Death!’ she said sternly, as she dropped her hands, to stare him full in the face.

He caught at the mantelpiece and steadied himself, his lips parting, but no words came. Then, with his countenance changing horribly, he said in a hoarse whisper :

‘How long?’

She grasped his meaning, and shook her head. He smiled, and swung himself to the table, caught the decanter in his hand, and stood pointing.

‘A glass—quick!’

She glided to the sideboard, and returned to place one before him. The neck of the decanter chattered loudly against the thin edge, and his teeth gnashed horribly as he poured out half the glass full, and then dropped the vessel, for the remainder to run gurgling out with a strange noise, as if the spirit within the decanter were dying. Then, grasping the glass, he raised it and held it out.

‘Drink!’ he said huskily—‘drink!’

The woman stood motionless for a few moments, rigid, as if petrified. Then, without a word, she raised her hand, took the glass calmly, and raised it to her

lips, when in a paroxysm of agony the dying man threw out his arms, the glass was dashed from her hand, and he fell heavily upon the floor. As he fell writhing upon the rug the door was thrust open, and a detective-sergeant and a couple of policemen entered the room.

‘John Huish, *alias* Mark Riversley, I have a warrant—— Good heavens!’ The sergeant stopped, caught the decanter from the table, smelt it, and set it down. ‘Too late!’ he exclaimed, as a strong odour of bitter almonds floated through the room. ‘Here—a doctor—quick!’

As one constable reached the door the man they sought uttered a low animal cry, writhed himself partly up, and caught at the woman’s hands as she sank upon her knees at his side.

‘Too—late,’ said the man faintly, as he threw up his head and seemed to be speaking to someone invisible to those present. ‘Your—fault, your sin—a curse—a curse!’

Those present glanced at one another and then at the woman who knelt there silent and motionless, as if carved in stone.

They thought him dead, but he struggled faintly, and the woman held his head upon her arm, as his eyes slowly turned upon her, and a smile played round his pinched blue lips.

She shuddered, and her brow knit as she bent her head to hear his dying curse.

‘Only a dog, and a dog’s death,’ he whispered—‘a wolf—in my blood—cursed—cursed. Gentlemen, too late; poison; I took it myself. An accident—I—Ah! No room for us both. Good-bye!—my——’

He made a faint effort to throw one arm round the woman’s neck, but it fell lifeless by his side, and as a shudder ran through him a piteous cry rang through the room, and all turned to see that a wild-looking, haggard woman had entered the room.

‘My poor, handsome boy!’ she wailed. ‘Dead, dead!’

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FAMILY DOCTOR.

BEING a matter-of-fact man, Dr. Stonor had communicated with the police, and many hours had not elapsed before he learned from them that a gentleman, such as he described, with a letter bearing his name, had been found, seriously injured, on one of the Surrey commons in the neighbourhood of Ripley.

On running down, he found John Huish lying at a cottage, bandaged up, and very weak, but quite sensible, and ready to smile in welcome of his old friend.

‘Why, my dear boy, how could you be so foolish as to leave me like this?’ exclaimed the doctor, who had heard of the condition in which his patient had been found. ‘You might have known that all I did was for your good.’

‘Yes, doctor, yes,’ he whispered ; and his visitor noticed how calm and sane were his looks and words ; ‘but I could bear it no longer. I had that dreadful idea in my head that I was going mad.’

‘And you know now that it was only a fancy?’

‘I do,’ said Huish. ‘Can you find my wife? Use every plan you can to rescue her from——’

‘You had better not talk, my boy,’ said the doctor, laying his cool hand upon the patient’s head, to find it, however, as cool. ‘She is quite safe—at her uncle’s.’

‘Is—is this true?’ said Huish eagerly. ‘You are not deceiving me?’

‘My dear boy, I would not deceive you ; but now be calm and quiet, or I will not answer for the consequences. You see, I do not even ask you about your encounter with the man that did this, although I am full of curiosity ; for I have heard a strangely confused account.’

‘Tell me one thing, doctor, and then I will ask no more,’ said Huish faintly. ‘You knew my father before I was born. Had I ever a brother?’

The doctor’s brow knit, and then he nodded.

‘Yes, I believe so ; but it is a sad story. Don’t ask any more. He died in infancy : at birth, I believe.’

‘No,’ said Huish calmly ; ‘he lived.’

Dr. Stonor sat watching the injured man, to see him sink into a calm, easy slumber, and on repeating his visit next day found him very weak, but refreshed and perfectly calm, and ready to converse upon the subject of his brother, when, feeling bound, under the circumstances, he told the wounded man what he knew of the past—of the encounter between Robert Millet and the elder Huish, and the latter’s marriage to Mary Riversley, while Captain Millet, who was terribly injured by his fall, had taken to his peculiar life, and held to it ever since.

‘But I was always given to understand that this child died,’ said the doctor, musing. ‘Your father and mother always believed it dead. It’s a strange story, my dear boy, and it seems impossible that there could be such a resemblance.’

‘Seems impossible, doctor, perhaps,’ said Huish, smiling ; ‘but I have looked him in the face. Thank God,’ he said fervently ; ‘the knowledge of his existence sweeps away the strange horror that has troubled me,

and accounts for all the past. Doctor, it must have been he who applied to you that day while I was abroad.'

Dr. Stonor's answer was to lay his hand upon his patient's forehead again, and John Huish smiled.

'My dear boy, it is absurd,' he exclaimed pettishly. 'I could not have made such a mistake. There; I must get back to town.'

'Come and see me to-morrow,' said Huish earnestly, 'and bring me back some news of——'

The doctor nodded and left; and by that time next day he had come to the conclusion that there were strange lives in this world, for he had had such information as took him to an old house in a City lane, where he had gazed upon the face of the dead semblance of the man he knew to be lying ill in the Surrey cottage. Moreover, he had found with the dead a thin, harsh-spoken woman, red-eyed and passionate with weeping, and ready on the slightest encouragement to burst into a torrent of grief and adulation of 'her boy,' as she called him.

'So handsome and so brave as he was, and such a gent as he could make himself, and live with swells,'

she sobbed, 'though he wouldn't know me sometimes in the street.'

'Did you know his father and mother?' said the doctor, hazarding a shot.

'I am his mother,' said the woman sharply. 'Poor, brave, handsome boy! The times I've found him in money, and warned him about danger, and watched for him when he wanted it done. I am his mother.'

'Nonsense!' said the doctor. 'You don't know me. I attended Captain Millet after his fall in the gravel-pit near the Dingle.'

'He was the gent that come to see Miss Ruth two years before, wasn't he?'

'To be sure,' said the doctor. 'You see, I am an old friend. Stop a moment,' said the doctor, referring to some notes he had made that morning in Wim-pole Street. 'Why, let me see, you must be Jane Glyne.'

'Which I ain't ashamed to own it,' said the woman, pushing back her thin gray hair.

'Of course not,' said the doctor. 'You were Mrs. Riversley's servant. You heard, of course, of the struggle between the two young men?'

‘I heard of it after,’ said the woman sharply; ‘and what’s more, I heard one of them shriek out at the time. It was when I was going away to where I had left the child.’

‘To be sure,’ said the doctor quietly; ‘but Miss Riversley thought it was dead.’

‘Yes,’ said the woman, ‘that was missus’s doings. She said no one must know it was alive. That’s why I took pity on the poor little thing, and brought him up.’

‘That, and the allowance,’ said the doctor significantly.

‘Well, thirty pounds a year wasn’t such a deal,’ said the woman; ‘but I somehow got fond of him, because he grew so clever. My! how he used to hate everybody of the name after he got to know who he was. I’ve known him to curse everybody who belonged to him, saying the bite of the dog I saved him from had given him a dog’s nature. It was his going down to the Dingle when he was fifteen and threatening an exposure that gave Mrs. Riversley the illness she died of; but I’d made her settle my money on me,’ chuckled the hag; ‘and it’s safe enough as long as I

live. He'll never want now what I saved for him, poor dear! nor me neither. My poor boy—dead!

The doctor drove back to Wimpole Street, where he had a long talk at the panel with Robert Millet, and the result was that they were both satisfied as to the identity of the elder natural brother of John Huish, whose aim through life seemed to have been to take advantage of his extraordinary resemblance, and to improve it by copying Huish's dress, carriage, very habits in fact, and using them to the injury of the younger brother, whom he bitterly hated for occupying the position that should have been his.

Miles away in the pleasant Surrey lane John Huish lay in happy ignorance of the fate of the man who had been his bitterest foe. He was very weak; but an awful load had been taken from his brain—the dread of insanity—and beside his bed knelt Gertrude, holding his hand with both of hers, and humbly asking his forgiveness for the doubts she had had.

'My darling!' he whispered, as he laid his other hand upon her soft, fair hair, 'I am so happy, and life seems so bright before me that I cannot bear

for you to lay one cloud upon its sunshine. Why, Gertrude, you might easily be deceived, when his presence, and the knowledge of such an existence, nearly drove me mad. There, little one, try and nurse me back to strength, for I have the hope now that nothing can take away. But if I die——’ he said sadly, as he gazed out of the window.

‘John—husband!’

‘Yes, sweet,’ he sighed, ‘if I die, remember I have been yours, and yours alone. Let no other hand touch me after death.’

‘Husband!’ cried Gertrude, in an agonized voice. ‘But no; you shall not die. John, darling, live for my sake—for the sake of our little child.’

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE EVENTS OF TWO YEARS.

TWO years slipped rapidly away, and society rolled on as usual. Many events had taken place, some of which had had their special interest to the characters in this story.

Ruth was thinner than of old, but she looked bright and happy, for the past two years had been very peaceful. She had paid occasional visits to Hampton Court, but Lord Henry's house seemed to be definitely her home, and the old man always treated her as if she were his child.

In the course of time various matrimonial speculations were set on foot at Hampton Court to provide Ruth with a rich husband; but as in each case the proposition of her joining a dinner-party

where either a wealthy plebeian or an elderly titled *roué* was to be the honoured guest, was crushed emphatically by Lady Henry Moorpark, who was firm in the extreme, the ladies by degrees gave Ruth's over as a hopeless case, leaving her to the tender mercies of her cousin.

In fact, as she was off the honourable sisters' hands, and their expenses were lessened, Ruth's name was not often mentioned except during Mr. Paul Montaigne's periodical calls, when, after walking across from Teddington, that gentleman would sip their tea and sigh, as he blandly alluded to the ingratitude of the world, and the fact that the servants at Lord Henry's had been instructed to say 'not at home' whenever he called.

Often and often bland Mr. Paul Montaigne would gnash his teeth when alone, and vow vengeance, but somehow Marcus Glen's threat had had so great an influence upon him that the thought thereof would make him pale and nervous for twenty-four hours after, and quite spoil his night's repose. But he heard merely with a grim smile that Captain Glen had become a constant visitor at Lord Henry Moor-

park's, and that his lordship gave Ruth Allerton away upon a certain happy day, for it is a world of change, and the time had come when Ruth's cousin could think quite calmly of the past.

The calm was not without its disturbance, though, for as Lord Henry sat one evening sipping his port and wondering whether he might not now go up and join the ladies, he heard a carriage stop at the door; there was a thunderous knock, a terrific peal at the bell, and directly after the old butler entered.

‘Mr. Elbraham, my lord. I have shown him into the library.’

‘Hang Mr. Elbraham!’ said his lordship to himself; but feeling that the visit must be one of importance, seeing how little intercourse they had, he followed the butler into the library, where the financier was walking hastily up and down. ‘Ha, Elbraham!’ he said, ‘come into the dining-room. I was having my port.’

‘Port, eh? Ah, yes! my throat's like a limekiln;’ and, following Lord Henry into the dining-room, the butler placed fresh glasses, and the financier gulped down a couple as quickly as he could.

‘Why, it’s an age since we met,’ said Lord Henry.

‘Good job for you,’ said Elbraham, mopping his red face and bald head. ‘Clo’s a regular devil. Is she here?’

‘Here!’ said Lord Henry. ‘Oh no! she has not been here for a long time.’

‘Then she *has* bolted!’

‘Has what?’ cried Lord Henry.

‘Bolted, Moorpark—bolted, d——n her! Left a note for me saying she was going to dine with her sister, and I took the bait, till, thinking it a good opportunity to go and look over her jewels, hang me if they weren’t all gone!’

‘Her jewels gone?’

‘Yes; and that made me suspicious. I went down directly and was going to ring, when I ran up against our buttons.’

‘Ran up against your buttons?’ said Lord Henry wonderingly.

‘Yes: the page-boy—with the large travelling-case in his hand. “Hullo, you sir,” says I, “what have you got there?”’

“A case missus said I was to take to Cannon

Street Station, sir, and meet her there; and I've been waiting about for ever so long and couldn't see her, sir, so I thought I'd better bring it back!"

"Quite right, my boy," I says. "Give it to me. There, be off down!"

'Well, sir, as soon as I was alone, I ripped up the bag, for it was locked; and hang me if it hadn't got in all her jewels—every blessed thing: diamonds and sapphires and rubies and emeralds and pearls; thousands and thousands of pounds' worth, for she would go it in jewels; and when I offended her I used to have to make it up by giving her something new. That woman cost me a pot of money, Moorpark, 'pon my soul she did, for I never shilly-shallied. If she was upset I always bought her something new.'

'But, really, I don't understand all this!' said Lord Henry feebly.

'Wait a bit. She had meant to take her jewels with her, and the idiot of a boy blundered the thing, somehow, and instead of her having them I have the whole blessed lot. For I pitched the cases in the iron safe where I keep my papers, locked 'em up, came on here to see after her, and there's the keys!'

He slapped his pocket, and looked at Lord Henry as he spoke.

‘I never expected it,’ said Elbraham coolly ; ‘it was her dodge.’

‘Then where do you expect she is?’

‘Why, bolted, man ; gone to the devil—or with the devil, that black-looking rascal Malpas ; and a deuced good job too !’

‘But this is very dreadful !’ said Lord Henry.

‘It would have been if she had got away with all those stones,’ said Elbraham, helping himself to more wine. ‘But she was done there. By Jingo ! what a cat-and-dog life we have led !’

‘But, my dear sir !’ cried Lord Henry, hardly able to conceal his disgust ; ‘what steps are you going to take to save her ?’

‘Save her ? save her ?’ said Elbraham. ‘She don’t want any saving !’

‘Oh yes, from such a terrible fall. It may not yet be too late !’

‘Save her ?’ cried Elbraham, with a hoarse chuckle. ‘Why, Moorpark, you don’t know her. Keep it dark from your wife, who is a good one. You drew the

best lot. There's no saving Clo ; she's bad to the core, and I'm devilish glad she's gone, for I shall get a little peace now.'

'But you are going to pursue her?' said Lord Henry.

'Pursue her ! What for ? To have her scratch my eyes out, and that black scoundrel Malpas punch my head ? No, thankye—deuced good port this ! She's gone, and jolly go with her ! I wash my hands of her now.'

'But this is terrible, Elbraham.'

'Terrible ? Why, it's bliss to me ; she'd have killed me. I used to be a bit jealous at first ; but I had to get over that, for she was always flirting with someone.'

'But you must fetch her back, Elbraham !' exclaimed Lord Henry excitedly. 'Think of the family credit !'

'Family credit !' cried Elbraham. 'Why, they hadn't got none—poor as Job, and nobody would trust them.'

'The family honour, then, sir,' said Lord Henry sternly.

‘Family honour’s best without her. Jolly good riddance of bad rubbish, I say! She’s gone, and she won’t come back; and as for hunting for her, why, it would be disgracing your wife to do so.’

‘But really——’ began Lord Henry.

‘Bah! Moorpark, you leave that to me; I’m a business man, and know what’s what. But, I say, it’s a lark, isn’t it?’

‘I don’t understand you,’ said Lord Henry, who could not conceal his disgust for the contemptible little wretch before him.

‘Why, about those jewels. My! how fine and mad she’ll be! It’s about the best thing I ever knew. She won’t get ’em now.’

Elbraham laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks, and then he wiped his eyes.

‘I say, Moorpark, I ought to be devilishly cut up, you know, about this; but the fact is, I’m devilish glad. I shall look nasty and make a show about being all wrong, you know, for one’s credit’s sake; but it ain’t my fault. I couldn’t help it; she had it all her own way. And the money she has spent—my!’

Elbraham helped himself to some more port, while Lord Henry sat and tapped the table with his carefully cared-for nails.

‘I’m not going to cry over spilt milk, Moorpark, I can tell you! She’s gone, and, as I said before, a good riddance!’

It was a good riddance for Lord Henry Moorpark when Elbraham went, which he did at last, after stubbornly refusing either to take or to allow any steps to be taken in pursuit of Clotilde.

‘No,’ he said, after his sixth glass of port, ‘I won’t spend the price of a Parl’y ticket on her; and I don’t know as I shall bother myself about divorce proceedings. What’s the good? Malpas hasn’t a penny in the world, so there’d be no costs; and as to being free, that’s what her ladyship would like. But, I say, Moorpark.’

‘Yes?’

‘What a sell about those jewels!’

He said it again as Lord Henry saw him into his carriage, and the next day he settled himself down in his sanctum with a very big cigar stuck between his lips, giving him the aspect of a very podgy sword-

fish that had burnt the tip of its weapon. Before him was a huge leather bill-case gorged with slips of bluish paper, every one of which, as he took it carefully out, bore a stamp in one corner, a reference to so many months after date, and was written across and signed. Many of them were endorsed with sign-manuals as well ; and these slips of paper he quietly examined as he took them out of one pocket of the great case and then thrust them into another.

By degrees an observer, had he been present, would have noticed that the pockets in which these slips were placed varied according to their dates, and that for the most part they were examined and replaced in the most unemotional manner ; but every now and then as Elbraham took one out he laid it on the table, drew violently at his cigar, emitted a tremendous cloud of smoke, and burst into a hoarse series of chuckles. Then he rubbed his hands and laughed again in an unpleasant, silent manner, twisting about in his pivoted library chair.

As he spun round, which, evidently being the result of practice, he did very cleverly, he wrinkled his face up in a way that with him indicated pleasure, the

whole performance giving him the aspect of some gigantic grotesque Japanese top.

Then he would stop short, puff at the great cigar, and stare with his prominent lobster eyes at the slip of paper, examining the date and turning it over and over.

‘Old cat!’ he ejaculated; and the slip of paper was laid aside, and a heavy paper-weight banged down upon it.

There were half a dozen of these heavy paper-weights, and every now and then one was lifted and a fresh slip of paper placed beneath it.

‘Old cat!’ he exclaimed again. Then there was another chuckle. ‘Let’s have another dive in the lucky bag!’ he exclaimed, and a fresh slip was brought out.

He did not laugh now, but glowered at the paper savagely.

‘Only wait; I’ll make him curl his black moustache to a pretty tune this time! He’ll have to sell out, and what will he do then? I wonder what a Major’s commission will fetch. Oh, hang it! they don’t sell ’em now. What the deuce do they do? I don’t care;

I'll ruin the beast, and then he may go to Clo to comfort him.'

He did not spin round this time as he did when he came upon slips of paper bearing the signature of Lady Littletown, and of which he now had a tiny heap, but sat glancing at the bold, striking autograph evidently written with a soft quill pen, and resembling a pair of thin Siamese twins with their heads together, and the word 'Malpas' after them, the said twins evidently doing duty for the letter A.

'Curse him! I'll ruin him, and then she'll cut him like a shot. Doosid glad I got the jewels! Bet sixpence he made sure of them, and now he's got her without a fifty pound in her pocket.'

Elbraham sat glaring at the bill, the big signature seeming to fascinate him, and for the moment it was so suggestive of the swarthy Major that unconsciously he took up an ivory-handled penknife, and, holding it dagger fashion, began to stab the paper through and through.

The holes reminded him that the slip of paper was valuable, so he threw the penknife aside with an oath, smoothed the bill, and, laying it by itself, he thumped

a heavy paperweight upon it, and seemed in his act as if he meant to crush Major Malpas as flat.

Several more acceptances followed, all representing heavy sums of money ; but they had no special interest for the financier, who went steadily on till, in succession, he found half a dozen accepted by one John Huish, and over these he frowned and snarled.

‘Repudiated ’em all,’ he said—‘swore he never accepted one ; and his lawyer set me at defiance. But I’ll keep ’em. He’ll buy ’em some day to keep the affair quiet. Rum start that ! I could not have told t’other from which, if it hadn’t been for the voice.’

He replaced these in his pocket-book, and at last came upon five accepted by Arthur Litton, the effect being to make Elbraham roar with laughter.

‘Puppy !’ he exclaimed, bringing his fist down bang upon the slips of paper, ‘puppy ! Fine gentleman. Haughty aristocrat. My dear Arthur, what a fix you are in, and how this will diminish dear Anna Maria’s money !’

‘Here’s another, and there are more to come !’ he cried, roaring with laughter ; and then he had a spin

till he felt giddy, after which he spun back in the other direction to counteract the dizziness, chuckled, rubbed his hands, found his cigar was out, and paused to light it before going through a less heavy batch of bills, the result being that he had beneath these paperweights a goodly show of the acceptances of Lady Littletown, Major Malpas, and Arthur Litton, over which he sat and gloated, smoking the while.

‘What a beautiful thing a bill is!’ exclaimed Elbraham at last. ‘It’s a blessing to an honest man: helps him out of his difficulties; gives such a nice discount to the holder; and shows him how to punish wicked people like these.’

He had another chuckle and a spin here, his feelings carrying him away to such an extent that he rather over-spun himself, and felt so giddy that he had to refresh himself from a silver flask that he kept in a drawer.

‘How I shall come down upon ’em!’ he said at last, as he puffed away reflectively at his cigar, which now grew rather short. ‘A thousand of bricks is nothing to it. My dear Lady Littletown will go

down upon her knees to me, and ask me to dinner. Ha ! ha ! ha ! she'll want to find me another wife, perhaps, curse her ! What a bad lot they are ! I only wish I'd a few bills of the old cats' at the private apartments—our dear aunts.'

He seemed to reflect here.

'I don't think Marie's a bad sort, after all,' he said at last. 'Old Moorpark had a deal the best of the bargain. I haven't anything to say against them : they cut Clo long enough ago, and quite right too. She's a devil ! What that gal has cost me !'

There was another fit of reflection here, during which Mr. Elbraham threw the end of his cigar into the waste-paper basket, and lit another, longer and stouter than the last, after taking a band of white and gold paper from around its middle.

'Then there's Master Arthur Litton,' he said. 'Pitched me over as soon as he'd married his rich wife. Called me an Israelitish humbug. Yes, conceited fool. Forgot all about his paper, and how I had helped him. Regularly cut me dead. Nice bit of money he had with Lady Anna Maria Morton, but he has made it fly, and all he could finger has gone.

Wait a bit ! I'll have him on his knees. He'll talk about Shylock then, eh ? Only wait ! I'll have something better than a pound of flesh.'

He chuckled and smoked for some minutes, and then the smoke began to come in longer puffs, the lines marked by his triumph and mirth disappeared, and he glared and rolled his unpleasantly prominent eyes.

'Curse him !' he cried at length hoarsely. 'He hasn't a clear hundred to bless himself with, and I hold his paper for thousands. I believe it was with my money he carried off Clo. Well, let him have her. I've had enough of the wicked devil. Let him have her. Ha ! ha ! ha ! My grand Major Malpas in the sheriff's hands, and Clo in lodgings without a penny ! I needn't want to trouble myself any more.'

The picture he mentally drew was so satisfactory that he indulged in another hoarse hollow laugh that was ugly upon the ear.

Then he carefully gathered together the three little batches of bills and secured each lot with an elastic band, before placing them in the pocket-book he carried in his breast, buttoned them up tightly, as if

they were the greatest treasures he possessed, and ended by locking up the bulky case.

‘Ha!’ he said, rising, ‘I’m sorry for poor Major Malpas. I wonder whether that chap Glen will get the step up. What a lovely invention a piece of paper is!’

CHAPTER XIX.

LAST WORDS.

THE result of Elbraham's consideration of the acceptances can be briefly told. There were sale bills out before long at Lady Littletown's bijou residence at Hampton, and also at Lady Anna Maria Morton's house in Bryanston Square.

The former lady had been in her carriage, and called upon Elbraham at his City office, and he laughed and asked her to take wine and biscuits, which she did, feeling sure that she could persuade him to make some arrangement to give her time ; but as soon as this was demanded, Elbraham, who had a tight hold upon her ladyship's property, politely told her, but in coarser language, that he would see her condemned first.

Mr. Arthur Litton also, seeing that he had been going too fast, called upon the financier, who seemed delighted to see him, and offered him a very choice cigar ; but as to leniency, Elbraham was as immovable as the Rock of Gibraltar, so Mr. Arthur Litton left, saying strange things, and went and placed his affairs in a solicitor's hands.

Major Malpas fared worst, for if ever man was socially ruined it was he. Elbraham seemed to spare no pains to weave a strong network round him, in which he buzzed till he got free, but only to skulk about the Continent, save when he paid a stolen visit to his native shore.

In company with Clotilde ?

By no means, for their intimacy soon came to an end, and news reached the private apartments at Hampton Court that the dove which had left that dove-cote had further besmirched her beautiful plumage. The honourable ladies, however, spoke of her in the future as dead, and by degrees became quite reconciled to Ruth's marriage to Captain Glen, principally through the constant dropping of the water that is said to wear a stone.

The water dropped from the Honourable Isabella's eyes, and the stone was her sister, who invited the happy pair down to Hampton Court to spend a few days at the Palace, where the Honourable Isabella's heart would flutter and her hands shake, but all in a very innocent way, for her love for Marcus Glen had become subdued to one of a very motherly kind, even as another love was dead and buried in the past.

There was a change at the house in Wimpole Street. First one window used to have the shutters unclosed, then another and another ; and at last it was noticed that the windows were cleaned. By the time John Huish had quite recovered from his injury, the place, though still suffering greatly from the want of paint, was so altered that, when the cab which had brought the convalescent and his young wife from the Waterloo Station, stopped, Huish had stared and told the driver to go on.

‘ This here's the number, sir,’ said the man sturdily ; and so it proved, for just then Vidler opened the door, and they entered a house they hardly seemed to know.

There were voices, too, as well as an abundance of light in the house ; and when the young couple, whose coming was expected, entered the drawing-room, it was to find quite a party assembled.

John Huish stopped short to gaze in wonderment, as Gertrude left his side, and ran forward to embrace a little thin old man, so gray and blanched that he looked almost ghostly as his white hands trembled over Gertrude and then were placed upon her head as she laid it against his breast.

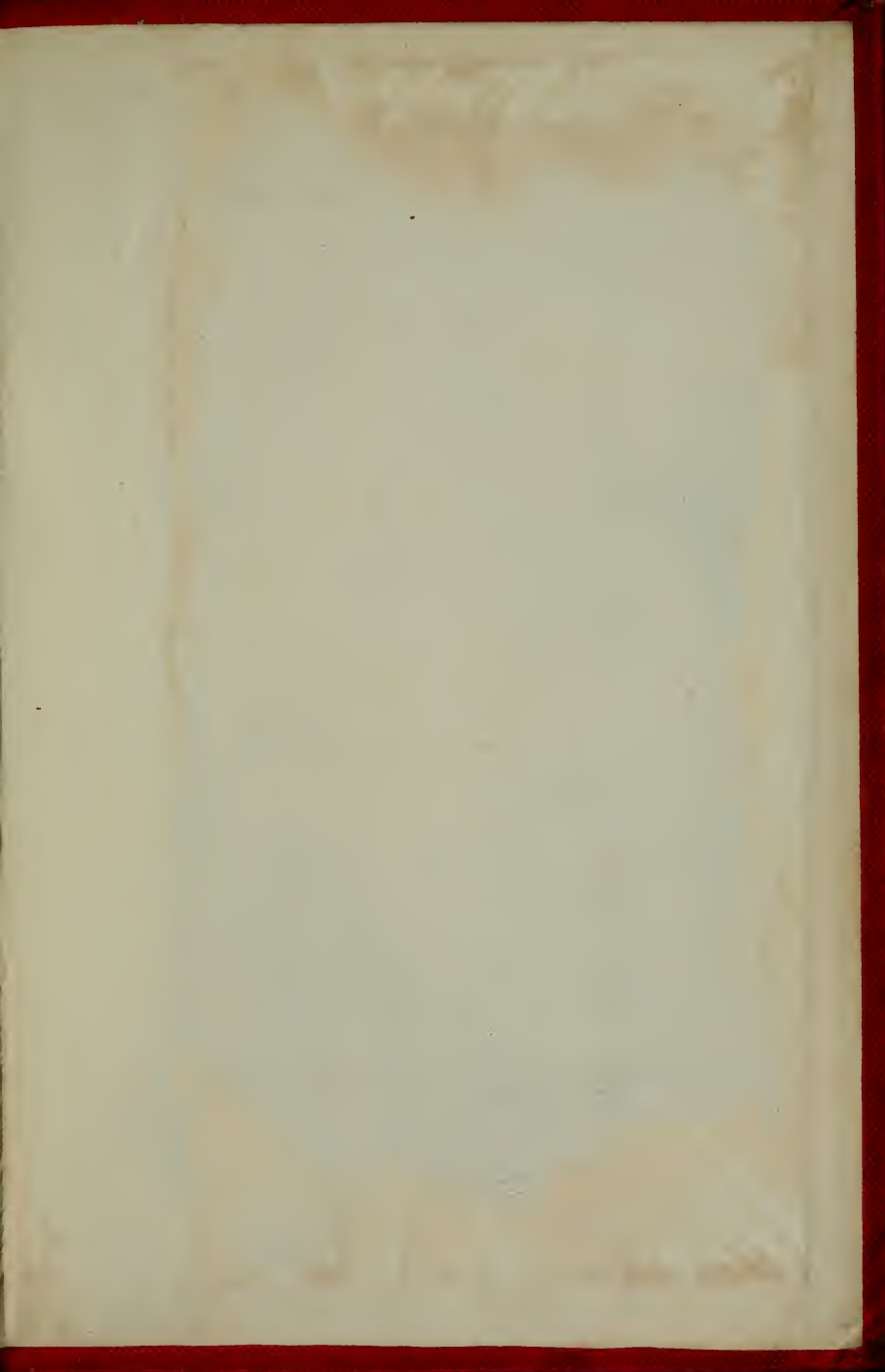
The young man's eyes turned sharply then to the panel in the wall, to see that it was closed and painted over.

'I'm very glad to see you, John Huish,' said a familiar voice, though, the next moment, as Gertrude rose to embrace her father, and the little white, bent old man stood up to limp painfully two or three steps to grasp both his hands.

John Huish could not speak, knowing what he did ; and, pale and flushed by turns, he stood grasping the old man's hands and thinking of how his father had robbed him of his love, almost of his life.

‘My dear John,’ he said, ‘you have taken my darling, and, as I have looked upon her always as my child, why, you must be my son. God bless you! The past is dead.’

THE END.



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